

The
SHADOW'S
EDGE



FREDERICK
BENDING

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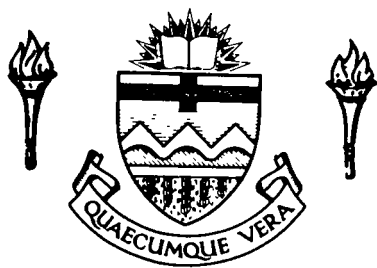
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THE SHADOW'S EDGE

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By

FREDERICK BENDING

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THE SHADOW'S EDGE

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THE SHADOW'S EDGE

By Frederick Bending.

CHAPTER I

HIGH up on the ridge behind the log cabin that nestled at the edge of the lake a man lay prone upon his stomach, watching. It had taken him the better part of two hours to work his way cautiously, and painfully withal, to a point of vantage from which he could see without fear of being seen. For an hour or more he had lain there, almost motionless, watching, waiting.

From his place of concealment was to be had an extended view of the wilderness that surrounded him—the sweeping curves of the lake shore, the forest thick to the water's edge; the wooded islands that stretched into the distance of water spaces in a vista seemingly ceaseless; the humped shoulders of the land that reared against the afterglow to the West, dark and inhospitable, showing its fir-top teeth—the forest never-ending.

But the landscape held nothing of interest for the feverish eyes that looked from hiding. The watcher's whole attention was bent upon the cabin below, upon the fire that flamed nearby and upon

the rugged figure passing between, intent only upon the cooking of an evening meal. Fascinated, he watched the steaming pots that hung above the fire and although at that distance no odors reached his nostrils, the saliva drooled from his thick lips as his teeth bared like an animal's. He was starving! Yet he dared not go down there—not yet. After a bit—when it got dark and the solitary occupant of the log cabin was asleep—perhaps his turn would come—Long since he had satisfied himself that there was only the one man to deal with down there at the prospector's cabin. God help him if he awoke!

For “Red” Lewis, gangster, gunman, train bandit and what not, was a long way from his favorite haunts; Chicago had not known him for many a day and he was in desperate extremity. Many times he had cursed the day that he had listened to “Lefty” Symes’ crazy talk of Northern gold that would be theirs for the filching. The whole proposition that had brought these two partners in crime into the North had proven an alien venture. In this godforsaken country they had no place; they did not understand it. Here were no fences, no Chinese dives in which to lay low; only clean fighting—in the open—and that was something neither of them knew anything about. Yet when the chance came to hold up the train, they had not stopped to think of these things but had “pulled the job off” only to dis-

cover too late that there was no "getaway" in blundering into the wilderness with a pair of "those damned redcoats" on their trail.

Red cursed them every time he thought of them. He cursed Symes now as he thought of him. For Red Lewis was gaunt as a wolf and his ugly, unshaven face was spotted with dark brown stains to mark the sledge-hammer blows with which Lefty had knocked him senseless in the bloody fight which had capped their folly when they quarrelled—back there on the shore of the lake somewhere—quarrelled over food, almost their last. And Lefty, fulfilling the portent of his name, had left him there, taking canoe, supplies, everything! Two days ago? One long nightmare! He was starving, half insane! But soon now he would eat again.

The sun was already down. The long streamers of cloud which trailed across the western sky were glowing faintly still with the fading glory of its going. The soft shadows were drifting imperceptibly farther and deeper, spreading over the rough hewn country until its solitude presently would be brimmed only with the silver twilight that serves for night in northern countries. Only the yellow camp-fire beside the log cabin below brightened with the darkening of the shadows.

The man on the ridge grunted with satisfaction as he noted the fact. He stirred for a change of posture and allowed his eyes to rove slowly along

the western skyline. Suddenly they paused. His protruding jaw dropped in dismay as he stared at the distant ledge of rock upon which a figure had unexpectedly appeared, limned against the saffron sky.

There was no mistaking that silhouette. Red Lewis knew every outline. It was the stalwart, erect figure of his Nemesis—a member of that new kind of police force which of late he had learned to hate and to fear—one of these Royal North West Mounted “Johnnies” whose uniform was of the saddle but who rode the tumbling white horses of wilderness rapids in a canoe with equal skill and had an uncanny habit of appearing unexpectedly close at hand when least wanted. Red knew what the figure was doing in this neighborhood and he snarled in his throat as he drew deeper into concealment.

Even at that distance every move of the figure on the ledge was visible. Now he was using field-glasses, slowly searching eastward into the shadows. Now he had seen the camp-fire! Red saw him lower the powerful glasses and abruptly vanish from the rocky height; that meant that his enemy would come straight to the cabin below. If only he had had a rifle, Red thought—but he was unarmed and swore impotently. He made no move to change his position. What was the use? Better to play the cards as they lay—and trust to luck.

Half an hour elapsed before the nose of the "mountie's" canoe pushed gently against the shore. Breathlessly Red watched the six-foot statue of alertness who stood in an attitude of keenest interest, reconnoitring the cabin and its approaches. Then with a brief inspection of his service automatic, the officer advanced cautiously to within a dozen feet of the open doorway from which proceeded a noisy unconcerned whistling, with more zest in it than tune. With the fire glare behind him he stood, waiting.

Presently the fugitive on the ridge above, peering forth eagerly, saw the man inside the cabin come walking out on his way to the fire, a huge granite tea-pot in his hand. It was like a play. Red swallowed convulsively as the quick-spoken "Hands up!" reached him in the quiet. It was a soundless, motionless moment that followed, broken suddenly by a loud guffaw from the man with the teapot which had gone aloft promptly enough, but which he now slowly lowered as his hearty voice boomed a greeting.

"'Lo, Steve! What the h— you t'ink you doing?"

The next instant they were shaking hands vigorously and laughing like old friends. Red Lewis spat in disgust. Gab, eat, smoke, gab—and he must wait on and on till they quit and went to sleep! If he only had a "gat" he could pick them off like tame crows! He cursed again

beneath his breath as he settled himself to wait with patience born of desperation.

The pallor of the night overspread the country till it lay like a ghostly sea in which the islands of the lake seemed to waver and shift in enshrouding mists. The air chilled. But cramped of limb and shivering miserably though he was, the outlaw hung doggedly to his vigil, afraid to stir from the comparative safety of his position on the ridge behind the cabin. For the moon was up now, the angling shadows shortening as it drew gradually overhead; with the white radiance came chilling vapors from the lake below.

And as time passed the occasional snatches of conversation that reached him from the men beside the fire brought sudden renewal of hope to the famished fugitive on the ridge. He learned that first thing in the morning "Gus", the prospectors' guide, had to leave for Beaver Landing to meet his employers, who were returning from a trip to the Outside. He learned further that the "mountie" had decided suddenly to accompany him on the trip. That would leave the camp unprotected.

As the significance of this unexpected piece of prospective good fortune dawned upon Red Lewis he had difficulty in restraining audible expression of his satisfaction. His eyes glowed. He studied the position of the moon. He knew exactly what he was going to do now.

By the time the men's pipes were smoked out and they were rolled in the blankets inside the cabin the moon would have swung over behind the ridge and the little world that centred about the cabin would have reverted to semi-darkness, its moonlit imagery swooning away. There was a slab of bacon rind—He knew the exact spot where the Swede had thrown it. He would creep down and get it and let that content him for the time being. He would retire then to a safer distance from the camp and wait until the dew was off the grass and the men had departed. Then the whole place would belong to him. The luck had turned.

The caution of the hunted man who moves at the risk of his life marked the criminal's stealthy approach. The log cabin was old but it had been kept in good repair; the curtains at its windows were fresh and clean and indicated the hand of a woman. Red had not emerged from his concealment until the canoe which he had watched depart was completely out of sight; but he was taking no chances and he reconnoitred the surroundings thoroughly before venturing to creep to a window and peek in. Finally, after listening in vain for sounds from within, he sidled around to the door and pushed it open gently.

His eyes glittered with satisfaction, gaunt in their sockets. From the doorway he surveyed the interior swiftly, the rugs on the floor, the simple

pictures and ornaments. Two doors opened off the main room, one of them half open. Real beds! Real furniture!—city stuff! And everywhere that feminine touch; but “the moll” was nowhere in sight.

Satisfied that he was in sole possession, Red Lewis made straight for the cupboards at the rear. At sight of the food stored there, shelf upon shelf, a guttural cry escaped him and he pounced upon a plate of cold meat, snatched a loaf of bread, dropped to the floor and wolfed it with strange sounds. He gorged his famished body to satisfaction. Then he slouched down to the lake and drank several tins of the clear water. Some of the blind stagnant hopelessness had vanished from his eyes. He was satisfied—for the first time in days.

About to turn and retrace his steps, he noted for the first time the basswood canoe, drawn up in the bushes. He recognized it at once; for during the past few days he had been haunted by a constant fear of it and its owner. The sight of it now amused him and he grinned, grinned at the thought which came seeping into his mind. He would steal it. If he could once get among the islands at the north end of the lake, he would be safe for a time and might even escape his pursuer altogether and head back to the cities where he belonged.

"A damn good joke on the bull!" he chortled to himself as he lifted the canoe into the water.

Filled with this new idea, he limped heavily back towards the cabin. At the door he paused to look across the lake in the direction of The Landing. The sun danced on an empty expanse of water. All was quiet and still. Inside the cabin he exchanged his torn and mud-smeared black coat for a hunting jacket that hung behind the door. Then to the canoe he carried an assortment of provisions—enough to outfit him for a week or more. He found a Winchester repeater hanging on some wooden pegs and a box of cartridges on a shelf above it.

Red was whistling to himself contentedly as he busied about. He certainly was in luck. His particular little guardian devil had called for a new deal. He had lots of time and as he gazed around the room his eye rested upon a large photo of a beautiful young woman, hanging above the fireplace in a birch-bark frame. A sneer twisted his ugly mouth as he walked over and stood in front of it. So this was the photo the mounted policeman had been raving about last night; he had heard him talking to the guide about it when they sat by the fire, smoking. Well—

His hand was outstretched to pull it from the wall and destroy it—when something touched his leg. With a startled oath Red leaped six feet, whirling as he jumped to meet he knew not what—

crouching for attack, his eyes blazing with anger. But only a little black cat looked up at him, meowing.

Red did not laugh. Instead his anger mounted at the start the innocent little creature had given him. The beast that was in him showed in his ugly face and suddenly he stepped forward and lifted the cat on his boot, sending it hurtling through the open doorway. It came down heavily on its feet and with tail swollen went scuttling into the undergrowth.

More upset than he would have imagined possible, Red paddled north, no longer whistling. Noon found him camped high up in a rocky cavern in the heart of the islands. He lay on his back, smoking one of the cigars he had picked up at the cabin. He had eaten again and as he gazed around him he was pleased with his rocky retreat. For the first time in weeks of fear-haunted days he felt content in a solid, hopeful sort of way. He had plenty of food, a canoe, a good rifle and a headstart and he was experiencing an inward glow of satisfaction in the manner of his accomplishment.

He did not feel lonesome; the fate of his brother in crime worried him not at all. He felt drowsy presently. The flares of noonday heat shot up from the blueish green of the lake. There was plenty of time. He stretched out luxuriously—and slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER II

THE big canoe of Gus Jonsen, the guide, held steadily to a direct course across the lake which shimmered in a blur of rising mists, beautiful in its changing lights and shadows. The two occupants had settled down to the rhythmic stroke of long-distance paddling that sped them past rocky islets and great shadowy masses of timberland, incessantly whispering in the breeze; past masses of moss-covered rock, patchy with fire-blasted whips of trees that trembled against a hard blue sky. As the hours lengthened speech languished. Like most woodsmen of long experience the Swede was at no time talkative and Sergeant Steve Hardy, R.N.W.M.P., was accustomed to long periods of self-communion and rather welcomed the guide's taciturnity.

As his arms swung the paddle in mechanical unison with the heaving muscles of Jonsen's huge shoulders at the bow, Sergeant Hardy's thoughts were busy with a number of things. Blue, brown, hazel or whatever color her eyes might be, they would be lovely eyes; they would have to be to harmonize with such a lovely face as that which looked forth from the birchbark frame above the fireplace back at that lone cabin they had left.

Bar none, it was the most beautiful photograph he had seen and it was an exciting thought that a few miles distant—at the Landing—that very day—he might actually encounter the original. For Gus was making this trip for the purpose of meeting his employers who would be back north on the boat due to reach the Landing that day and the girl was coming up with her father, guardian, uncle or whatever he was. Gus had said so.

And it was lucky that Sergeant Hardy had happened along in time to accompany him on this little run back to the Landing; for he might find that some word of Corporal Charlie Agnew had drifted in. The two had parted company scarcely two days ago upon learning that the men they were after had stolen a canoe and taken to the lake. Agnew had worked his way along the eastern shore while his superior set out to search the western shore. It was evident that their quarry was heading for the large group of islands at the head of the lake and Sergeant Hardy now had satisfied himself that they had reached their objective. He knew the country and he knew that the real search would take place among those hundreds of islands. He knew also that Symes and Lewis would probably lay low for a while once they reached their retreat and it was perfectly safe for him to take a day off to run back to the Landing to see if Agnew had despatched any message—Let Gus grin his fool head off if he

liked; it was important that he go back to the Landing. What did a fool Swede know about the business of trailing criminals or the methods of the Royal North West Mounted—?

Anyway, wasn't it his duty to meet these prospectors and learn what was afoot in regard to that isolated claim back there? Gus had not told him much, but he could read between the lines and the fact that there had been a sudden trip east—all the way to New York—could mean only that a rich strike had been made and that developments on a large scale were impending. Sergeant Hardy knew the North and he knew that the North was on the threshold of great things. Already there was much talk of gold and the vanguard of the army of adventurers who are forever ready to seek it had put in an appearance at Le Pas.

"This place belong to a man named Hardy—from Montreal," Gus had explained in answer to his questions. "'Bout two weeks ago, minin' engineer named Mangers—he hired me take him out and I brought him here one night out of a storm. Pretty soon he monkey 'round and stir up float and got after the old man, wantin' to buy; but old Hardy sell? Nothin' doin'! Him and the young lady comes up here some years, camping out for the summer, fishin' and loafin' 'round with some friends. This year they hires me to cook an it was when I's gettin' the place licked into shape this here Mangers come up with

me. There was a lot of talk after the old man gets here; then, ten days ago, they all goes off—whole damn bunch—to New York or some place—comin' right back, they said."

Sergeant Hardy knew his North and he was tremendously interested in what Gus said. Jonsen lived at Le Pas, hiring out as guide in the summer months and trapping extensively in the winter; he had been doing this for years and there were few more reliable guides in the country than Gus. Sergeant Hardy himself lived at Le Pas; at least, his mother lived there and Steve stayed with her whenever his work permitted. And there was always that staunch old friend of his mother's, Inspector O'Malley, to guard her from harm. The Force boasted no finer officer than O'Malley who had taken young Hardy under his wing as a raw recruit and bred in him a fitting respect for the traditions represented by the uniform he wore. It was when Inspector O'Malley had been transferred to Northern Manitoba that the Hardy's, mother and son, had likewise taken up residence at Le Pas, Steve transferring from his patrol in Northern Saskatchewan to remain within O'Malley's jurisdiction.

A grunt from Gus recalled the smiling young man's thoughts and he saw that ahead of them the Landing was becoming more and more distinct. As they drew near, the roar of the Sturgeon-Weir Rapids came and went with the

ever changing gusts of wind. The northern sun was well over head when they drew up their canoe on the shore. Lifting their light craft from the water and turning it over, they climbed up the muddy bank and became at once the centre of observation to numerous Indian children and dogs.

The little settlement of log cabins was wildly astir, its multi-colored inhabitants moving back and forth along the waterfront packing canoes at the lakeside and unloading the train of freight wagons which had arrived that morning from Sturgeon Lake, seventeen miles to the southeast. Everywhere dogs bounded about, yelping foolishly. Canoes, mostly occupied by dusky Indians, flashed to and fro across the bay where the Indian village was located, a settlement consisting of a motley collection of tents. The historic wigwam of the Indian—these Indians at any rate—seems to have passed into the limbo of forgotten things. Here the red man loafs around during the summer—all except a few who do freighting for the trader or act as guides for prospectors; in the winter they hunt, trap the fur animals, content to know nothing of outside happenings.

As the two new arrivals walked toward the boarding-house, they passed little knots of khaki-clad prospectors who had just reached the Landing and were impatient to get on their way. To each group they passed the time of day or gave

such information as the newcomers had been unable to obtain. Gus's manner towards strangers did not invite confidence, but the newcomers were surprised at his supply of knowledge and the air of good-fellowship with which he gave it out discounted the strong language with which his conversation was so freely punctuated. Most of these men, however, were old timers whose one object in life was to stake the richest claim in the world, although none of these "sourdoughs" knew very definitely where he was going or when he would return.

Into the general discussion, of which Sergeant Hardy was for the most part only an interested listener, came a dusty weather-beaten little man—straight for the young officer.

"Hallo, Steve—Gus! How's things?" He gripped the hands of both. "Say, boys, I think I've struck—"

Before he could finish the other men had crowded around him, firing questions without waiting for answers, impatient to know, to share with him the treasure which the country held. With a wave of the hand he indicated the northern end of the lake.

"Up there—tons of it, simply tons!" He turned his back on the knot of excited men, caught Steve by the elbow and piloted him aside, lowering his voice. "Lucky I met you, Steve. I've just come from the Narrows an' I met Agnew up there; he's

on his way here now—should arrive to-morrow afternoon.” To the unspoken question in Sergeant Hardy’s keen gray eyes, he nodded and smiled. “He’s got his man all right.”

“Good!” breathed Steve with satisfaction. “Did he say which one?”

“Told me to tell you he had Symes. I think he wants to talk to you about the other one—” He interrupted himself with a wave of the arm to a friend he had just seen. “Just a minute, Mac!—Well, good luck, Steve. See you in town this winter, I guess. So-long, you fellows!”

The boarding house towards which Hardy and the guide now moved was a large whitewashed building, facing the lake. It had the appearance of an ordinary settler’s abode in the wilderness which had been converted into a forest inn by the simple expedient of attaching a bunk-house for travelling prospectors where they could unroll their own blankets and make themselves entirely free. Another wing had been added with a wide verandah in front of it and this had been converted into a modest store with a little wooden post-office wicket at one end.

“Guess the bunch is inside,” said Gus. “Come on in and get acquainted. What the—!” A grin spread over his face as he guessed the reason for his companion’s diffidence. “She won’t bite you, Steve,” he reassured provokingly and jerked his head towards the door.

Half angry at himself, Hardy followed him and stood just inside. He was glad to see the familiar welcoming face of Mrs. Hayley, who had heard their entry and now came from the kitchen patting her hair and smoothing her white apron.

"Wantin' dinner, boys?" she asked in her deep, pleasant voice.

"Bet your life, missus!" grinned Gus over his shoulder as he stepped across the commodious dining-room to greet a man who sat at a corner table upon which stood two empty beer bottles. He gave Gus a cigar and as the big woodsman bit the end off it he waved Sergeant Hardy to join them.

"This is Mister Maugers, Steve, and this is Sergeant Hardy, Mister Maugers, a friend o' mine and a damn good man to be friends with. Say, I got to go into the kitchen a minute," and he left them in pursuit of Mrs. Hayley who had hustled back to her stove.

As they smiled and shook hands the young officer sensed a subtle warning in that introduction, the slight emphasis on the *Mister*, the direct look with which Jonsen had accompanied it. He bent his keen, cool gaze upon the stranger as they talked, not a single detail of his heavy frame and rugged physique escaping him, but no sign of his mental reservations was apparent in his polite manner.

"Pleasant trip? Well—fair, yes." Maugers

waved towards a chair and passed across a cigar. "But it's a pretty rough trip from Sturgeon just now, especially for ladies. Had a lot of rain lately and that makes the going bad. All right when you get as far as here, though."

"You have ladies with you, then?" enquired Hardy rather too casually. "That is sufficiently unusual to be interesting in this locality."

"Yes, and between you and me, Sergeant . . ."

A peal of girlish laughter from the kitchen interrupted him and he forgot the intended confidence to frown in apparent disapproval.

"Come here, young feller!" roared Gus and Sergeant Hardy turned to see the grinning Jonsen in the kitchen doorway, beckoning to him.

In some confusion Steve excused himself and obeyed the summons. The girl whose charming photo had inspired him with the need of making this trip was out there in the kitchen! He felt, all at once, hot and uncomfortable, foolish. He tried to recall all the pleasant little speeches he had thought out on the way over, but when at last he stepped into the kitchen he was in a mental panic for a moment and he felt angry with himself for awkwardness so foreign to him.

By the stove stood Mrs. Hayley; Gus had chosen the back door as the vantage point from which to obtain a view of the meeting. To his left, by a table, was a girl. Her back was towards

him, and with round young arms bared she was enjoying a real old-fashioned wash in a real old-fashioned washbowl. Upon Hardy's entry she had looked up at a calender that hung on the wall in front of her and which, contrary to all precedent, was free from fly-specks. Then she reached for the towel, turning at the same time, her face flushing.

Outside of this she was entirely self possessed and smiling in welcome to the newcomer, she commenced calmly to dry her face and arms. To Sergeant Steve Hardy she looked like some slender princess who had just stepped from the pages of a romance—and this in spite of her practical actions. She was dressed in a khaki-colored riding costume and a blue silk waist, set off by a four-in-hand tie; bead-worked gauntlets lay on a corner of the table.

"This here's my helper," grinned Gus. "Got'm trained to wash and dry dishes!" and both women laughed. The girl flashed one quick glance into a mirror and came across to him with hand outstretched.

"We don't believe him, do we, Mrs. Hayley?" Hardy flushed as his eyes travelled down from the girl's face to his big, brown fist in which the little white hand had almost completely disappeared. He felt peculiarly ashamed of himself for feeling ashamed and he said: "Hope you had a pleasant trip. This is a fine country. . . ."

"I love it! My father and I come up here every year that he can get away. I am Joyce Chetwood. I—I think Gus must have spoken of me."

"And my name is Hardy—Steve Hardy. All this seems rather crude, Miss Chetwood, but it looks as though we must help ourselves," laughed Steve, feeling more and more sure of himself.

"I would like you to meet daddy and Dorothy," said the girl as there came the sound of footsteps descending the wooden stair. "We have brought my sister with us this time, Gus. He is really my guardian and Dorothy his only daughter," she confided to Steve as she led the way to the sitting-room, "but it is hard for me to realize that."

Maugers met them at the door, evidently coming in search of them. The expression on the mining engineer's dark, sunburned face was one of discontent and as Steve noted the small eyes, the wide thick-lipped mouth and the undoubted strength of bone and muscle in the five-foot-seven figure he was conscious of a curious resentment to the man who proceeded to engage the young woman in a ready flow of small talk.

He had no time to analyze the fleeting impression, his attention being attracted by the entry of an elderly gentleman and a young girl, fair haired and blue eyed, who could not have been more than sixteen. He dismissed her with a mental note that she was not as pretty as his

“photo queen” and allowed his interest to focus upon her father, sensing at once that here was a man of affairs, of cosmopolitan centres. He was a big man physically also, tall and broad shouldered, and with the heavy hands of one who in his youth had done hard manual work. His hair, almost white, was carefully parted on the right side and brushed back from a high, furrowed forehead. Bushy eyebrows shaded deep, dark eyes while a rather large nose, a wide firm mouth and a firm chin with the barest hint of a cleft contributed to the strength of the face.

Sergeant Hardy unconsciously straightened to his full height for the meeting. He was not at all prepared for the older man's strange behavior. There was nothing in the erect, athletic figure of the young officer, smartly uniformed, to cause Mr. Martin Hardy, of Montreal, to stop in his tracks while he gazed intently into the young man's level eyes, yet that is what he did. As he came slowly across the room towards him, Steve even fancied he saw new lines of age come into the stranger's face and it seemed as if the other thought they had met before somewhere. Within a few feet of him, instead of addressing him, however, the gentleman turned suddenly to Gus Jonsen.

“Good day, Gus. Glad to see you again. Everything all right at the camp? I have brought my daughter, Dorothy, along as company for Joyce.”

His voice was high pitched, nervous, and he

turned away from them both; but there was no escaping Jonsen's gruff, free speech.

"Mr. Hardy, this here's my friend, Sergeant Steve Hardy Funny, eh?—same name as you."

"Pleased to know you—sir," he said with studied politeness. "Your life here must be very interesting. This is my daughter, Dorothy, and—my ward, Miss Chetwood."

"Oh, you're late, daddy, we've met before—in the kitchen," cried the latter, flashing Steve a smile.

In spite of the glow of gladness which that smile aroused, however, he began to feel uncomfortable again as he took the limp little hand which the younger girl extended to him. There was a reserve about this young lady of the cities which seemed to recall him to a sense of a high civilization that did not belong in frontier surroundings. She was politely expressing the hope that he would be near enough to their camp to recount some of his experiences as she had heard so much about the Northwest Police and was so very interested. Nevertheless, as he listened and tried hard to summon the English language to his rescue, he felt that this chit of girl was different, difficult. He turned to bring her father into the conversation—only to find that Mr. Hardy, Mangers and Gus were going outside, evidently to make arrangements for departure.

"Gus and Mr. Maugers are taking the big canoe with our belongings," volunteered Joyce, "and I wonder, Sergeant Hardy, if you would help paddle our canoe back to camp. Gus was telling me you left your own canoe—"

"Yes, I did, Miss Chetwood," nodded Steve eagerly. "I'll be tickled to death—I mean—only too pleased—" He joined in her merry laugh. "Well, anyway, I've got to go back," he finished lamely.

Wait till they got in the canoe! He'd show her! She would find that he was an adept with the paddle anyway. He looked at her in frank admiration. She was so slender and boy-like in her tailor-fitted habit—no need to get excited—a bit of a girl, not more than twenty at the outside, he thought. Lord, but she was a beauty, a thoroughbred!

"I am so glad you are going to help in our canoe," came Dorothy's relieved accents. "I do not like canoes; they're so tippy. But Joyce can paddle quite well, Mr. Hardy, and daddy is not really strong enough, although he—"

"Who says I'm not strong enough? What for?" demanded her father as he stepped inside once more.

"I did and you know you are not," declared Dorothy. "That is why I am so glad Mr. Hardy is going to do the paddling—"

"What's that? I don't think I understand."

"I asked him to," explained Joyce, smiling and taking his arm. "And you are to say: 'Fine! It's awfully good of him.' Say it!"

"Fine! It's awfully good of him," he smiled back at her; but the smile did not reflect undue enthusiasm.

"I'll be glad to be of any assistance I can," ventured Steve. "But I shall also be indebted for the privilege as my own canoe is near your camp, and I came over to the Landing only because Gus insisted—"

"That's all right, Sergeant. By all means! Glad to have you and very grateful, I'm sure. We'll start out right after dinner—"

Steve watched him as he went across the room to greet Mrs. Hayley, an arm about the waist of each of the two girls. Then young Sergeant Hardy shrugged his shoulders and went outside. Unless he was very much mistaken, Mr. Hardy, of Montreal, rather resented the presence of a stranger in his party. But that was something which the said stranger had no intention of worrying over.

CHAPTER III

BY the time the canoes had neared the end of the journey and the camp was in sight the last glimmer of day was fading. Everywhere lay dense shadows and placid high lights. The rugged shore line, capped by trees, arose sheer as a wall.

The trip had developed into a race between the two canoes. Following Gus Jonsen's laughing challenge, when he and Maugers had left the Landing in the big freight canoe, Steve and the others had taken to the water with a good seven-minute handicap against them. The young man had enjoyed the trip to the utmost; from his place in the stern he had full opportunity of admiring Joyce Chetwood at the bow and he saw at once that she knew well how to swing a paddle effectively. Her lithe young body, bending untiringly to the work, had been an inspiration. Early in the race she had flung aside her hat and her bright brown hair, loosened by her energetic movements and an occasional puff of wind, was in glorious disarray. Every now and then she had called back over her shoulder to him for more speed, flashing a flushed, beautiful face so full of

animation that his heart was scarcely performing its functions in a normal manner.

Her guardian and the younger girl sat amidships, with their hand luggage in front. Not once had Martin Hardy spoken to Steve and, except for an occasional word to his daughter, the older man had maintained a solemn silence, evidently lost in his own thoughts. His first intimation of an interest in his surroundings did not come until they were within a few hundred yards of the camp and succeeded in passing the big canoe in a final spurt of speed. Joyce flung merry taunts at Gus as they swept by and even Mr. Hardy and Dorothy shared her enthusiasm and waved their hands.

It was quite dusk when the last bale had been unloaded and stored. The moon was already up and everywhere spangles of light lay over the ground like a mottled skin. While Gus was building a fire and making preparations for supper, Steve helped Maugers pitch his tent. The voices of the girls, chattering like magpies, reached them from the cabin, with an accompaniment of clattering dishes. Maugers was not in a talkative mood and when he answered a question his tone was almost surly. Steve knew that the engineer was studying him as he worked and he smiled to himself; it was not hard to understand the reason for Mauger's annoyance at his presence. Well, Miss Joyce Chetwood was a prize to turn any

man's head. He whistled happily as he tightened the guy ropes.

"All right, Gus, make the tea please. Everything else is ready and everybody is tired and hungry."

She was standing in the doorway, hands on her hips. Then she skipped across to the fire and for the life of him Sergeant Steve Hardy could not keep his eyes off her. She had removed the smart, tight fitting coat in favor of a trim waist with up-turned sleeves and the flames of the fire illumined her slim young figure in bold outline. The impulse to pass around the fire and stand beside her was irresistible and as he stood there, he took advantage of his darkened face to regard the top of her shining head with a tenderness which would have made him flush had he known that Maugers had surprised the look.

"And is that funny little tent over there where you are going to sleep, Sergeant Hardy?" cried Joyce with interest.

"Yes, and very comfortable, thank you," nodded Steve. "I am obliged to carry my own board and lodging with me, you know . . ."

"He don't board when he's on the trail; he fasts!" Gus rumbled. "He only eats when he can bum a meal—like now! All right, Miss."

Sergeant Steve Hardy, like all healthy young animals who live an outdoor life, took a keen interest in his appetite and its gratification; but it

is doubtful if he had ever eaten a more enjoyable meal than that to which he now sat down. The food was good and there was plenty of it—two essentials—but it must be confessed that merry quips and a beautiful young girl to smile at one are wonderful aids to digestion. There was more serious talk also—talk of the North and its wonderful future, its wealth of natural resources, its scenic beauty—and as he held forth upon this topic in answer to their questions Steve felt entirely at ease and knew that he talked well.

The clearing away of the dishes did not take long and soon the camp was snug for the night. The journey had fatigued most of the party and in less than an hour lights were out and silence held possession. Cool sweet airs wafted from the depths of the forest and the world was wrapped in moonlight and shadow underneath the watchful stars.

For some time after the others had retired, Steve and Gus sat smoking a final pipe beside the camp fire. And as they sat dark masses of clouds stole over the lake, obscuring the moon. In the distance lightning flashed occasionally and the increased whispering of the wind seemed to presage a storm. Steve cast an eye overhead.

“Going to have rain, Gus? Hope it keeps off till I get back to the Landing.”

“I don’t t’ink so. Maybe a little to-morrow. Not much.”

They relapsed into silence for a few moments.

"Well, Gus, you've noticed that we've had a visitor here while we were over there to-day?"

"Yes."

"My canoe's gone."

"Yes—and my rifle."

"The devil!" and Sergeant Hardy looked across at the big woodsman with a sober face. "That's bad. Red Lewis, of course."

Jonsen nodded in silence.

"He can't get out of this lake and to-morrow—"

"Canoe, grub, ammunition and rifle—an' blankets—we won't be seein' you for some time, young feller."

"I'm going back to the Landing to-morrow to meet Agnew—back here by noon next day. I ought to have him within twenty-four hours after that," objected Steve confidently.

"Maybe," grunted Gus non-committally. "Didn't say anything before because I didn't want to spoil the girl's first night—I mean the new girl, the old man's daughter. She looks like she might scare easy."

Steve nodded his approval.

"The other one—Miss Chetwood—she's different; but it's just as well to keep all this from them, Gus."

Jonsen tapped the bowl of his pipe against the heel of his boot and got to his feet for a prodi-

gious stretch. He was getting drowsy and the proximity of a desperado could not be allowed to interfere with his sleep.

"Mighty fine girl, Steve. Damn good sport! Asked me lot 'bout you at the Landing—pumped me dry—reg'lar devil for t'at." He punched the other in the ribs. "Good-night, young feller," and Gus disappeared under the flap of his tent.

The smile lingered on Sergeant Steve Hardy's handsome virile face as he sat on beside the dying fire, gazing into its wind-palpitating heart, pondering in self-examination. He shivered and with a last look around to see that everything was in order he walked across to his one-man tent; but, rolled in his blankets, he still pondered. He had always felt independent, satisfied with his mode of living, content to share life with his mother, the only living relative he had who was near and dear to him. He had grown to love the outdoor life of the North—its color and beauty, its twinkling lights, the vast vistas of balsam and spruce, its great masses of ice-scarred rocks rolled down from the barren lands. It was a great life and it had made a splendid man of him, tanning his cheeks and throat to ruddy bronze.

The emotions which stirred him now he resented. He tried to analyze them. What was the matter that he should suddenly feel that fine and all as the life was, something was lacking—something vital that he had missed. And the analysis

brought him suddenly to the realization that this girl, Joyce Chetwood—Yet he was not in love or anything like that. Utter nonsense! He wondered if she thought of him merely as a policeman, something of passing interest—in a scarlet uniform like a soldier, but a policeman nonetheless who arrested drunken rowdies and lumberjacks in frontier saloons! He dismissed the thought as unworthy of her. Yet he was sure she would not understand his feelings. Women never did understand how a fellow felt about some things and she was only a young girl . . .

His wandering thoughts went off at a tangent. He was back again at the boarding house—saw the girl's guardian standing and staring at him, coming toward him—with a look on his face—half awe, half—fear? Impossible! He had never seen the man before, had scarcely heard of him even. Why should he be afraid—if that was what that look meant? Besides his mother Steve had no living relatives and Hardy was a common enough name—like Brown, Smith,—The effort to interpret the incident was futile, foolish.

He brushed these thoughts aside at last, telling himself that they were inspired by his police instincts. Martin Hardy had merely thought he recognized a face he knew and had been mistaken. Such mistakes often happened. All the rest of it must have been but a child of his fancy.

Satisfied and relieved, Steve turned on his side and went to sleep immediately.

CHAPTER IV

THE grass was heavy with dew when Sergeant Hardy stepped from his little tent next morning. During the night the wind had died down and all signs of thunder storm had departed. Black edged against the rosy light of early dawn, the trellis of trees stretched into the spaces of the north and south. The quickly swelling light gathered and spread over the clearing, bathing the trim little cabin in a ruddy glow as the sun showed a disk edge of burnished copper above the eastern rim of the lake.

Gus was already standing over a crackling fire, cooking breakfast and greeted him with a grin.

"Well, you were right about the storm, old timer. Ain't this simply great!" He breathed deeply of the fresh morning air and felt like emitting a whoop as he ran down the little path to the lake to wash, while Jonsen grinned after him with something very like affection in the steady blue eyes.

From the little window on the east side of the cabin a second pair of eyes watched him at his ablutions—bright eyes that smiled merrily as they watched. The vigorous young man, threshing his fingers through short crisp hair and shaking

his head in enjoyment fitted well into the boldly beautiful picture—the fire, palpitating in the wind, the rugged figure of Gus, the masses of moss-covered rock, the shifting black shadows as the golden light of the sun grew. Joyce breathed deeply as she gave her hair a final pat and skipped through the living-room to the door. The air was sweet with the aroma of pine and wild fruit.

Steve hummed a snatch of song as he came bounding back up the path. He gave Jonsen a playful slap as he passed him; the porridge sloped over into the fire.

“Hey, young feller!” protested Gus as he righted the pot.

“Good morning, Sergeant. Isn’t this simply glorious!” and they exchanged smiles of greeting. “Did I hear you telling Gus you were leaving us? Not before breakfast, surely!”

“I have to go back to the Landing, Miss Chetwood, to meet Corporal Agnew; but you would have a hard time, driving me away from that breakfast Gus is cooking, for it does smell awfully good,” he laughed.

“Morning, everybody,” greeted Mr. Hardy, who just then put in an appearance, looking as if he had rested well. “Where’s Dorothy?”

“She has a headache, daddy. The last two days have been too much for her, I guess—nothing serious, though.” As she gave him a hug and a kiss it was patent to Steve that these two under-

stood each other very thoroughly. "Don't go wandering off, now, for breakfast will be on the table in no time."

"May I speak to you for a moment, Mr. Hardy?" Steve strolled after him. "While I was away yesterday someone stole my canoe which was hauled up on the shore down there. I have a pretty good idea who took it and I might explain that I am not up here just now on regular patrol but on a special commission. Corporal Agnew and I are rounding up a couple of crooks who are badly wanted for a number of reasons. Agnew got one of them, I learned, yesterday; the other got my canoe. I want to warn you to be on your guard. His name's Red Lewis and he is not the sort of customer to have around."

"Thanks, Sergeant. It was thoughtful of you to keep this from the girls. My daughter is rather nervous—You want to borrow a canoe, perhaps? Take whatever you need, Sergeant, and welcome."

After breakfast Steve delayed his departure long enough for Miss Joyce Chetwood to write a letter home. He filled in the interval by writing two letters himself—one to Inspector O'Malley, reporting the theft of the canoe among other matters, and one to his mother, so full of boyish enthusiasm that it was bound to cheer her greatly and lull those apprehensions for his safety from which her mind was never quite free. By

the time he had sealed the envelopes, struck and rolled his tent and packed the canoe he found that Dorothy was feeling so much better that she had come outside to sit in the sun.

As he approached she jumped to her feet and levelled a kodak at him. She backed him around into an embarrassed pose in front of the cabin door. An involuntary exclamation of dismay at his shoulder made him turn to see the smiling face of Joyce Chetwood and just then the shutter of the kodak clicked.

"Joyce! How provoking! You've spoiled the picture!" cried Dorothy with a stamp of her foot.

"I'm so sorry, Dolly. Take another one." But it was the last of the film and the girl refused to detain Steve any longer. He promised to pose again sometime.

"I wish I were a man!" exclaimed Joyce softly as, arm in arm, they watched him launch the canoe.

"Well, I know one of us is glad you aint," grinned Gus who overheard the remark. He winked enigmatically. "His is a man's job," he added and strode off towards the lake.

"Oh, indeed I know it must be," Dorothy murmured. "It makes us girls feel so small and helpless."

"Helpless? Fiddlesticks!" cried Joyce. She waved her handkerchief.

Sergeant Steve Hardy looked back a full half

dozen times before his canoe became but a dot on the water and each time he waved his paddle, glistening in the sun. Then he settled down to a day of steady grind; for it would take almost twice as long to make the Landing as it had when he went across with Gus the previous day. As a matter of fact dozens of fires flung ruddy illuminations into the dusk when at last he arrived at the little settlement and the camp-fires were glowing across the bay also where the Indians had their tents.

The nose of his canoe had scarcely touched land before Corporal Agnew, who had been watching for him, came down the clay-bank. Agnew was newly shaved and evidently had been in for some hours. They gripped silently.

"Sandy Connors told me about your luck, Charlie. Good boy!"

"Got him easy, old chap—half starved—no fight left in the beggar."

Steve smiled with understanding. It was Agnew's way of taking the hard chase as a matter of course; the ease of the capture was sheer luck. Had Symes and Lewis been together . . .

"Where have you got him?"

"Over in the warehouse. I gave him one good feed and with prospects of more to come, he's quite safe. Come and see the animal. Any sign of Red?"

Steve recounted his suspicions and outlined his plans.

"You'll take Lefty down to O'Malley tomorrow, Charlie. I'll follow you in a day or two—with Red."

"He's a bad one," warned Agnew with a shake of the head. "They had a scrap the other day—over the grub. Even Lefty admits Lewis is a rotter. Got a rifle, too, you say? I don't like it, old chap."

"Well, don't go telling any fairy tales to mother. Tell her I've got a cinch—Oh, don't look so sober!" He laughed aloud. "Give her this letter, Charlie, and that will let you out. Say it tells everything—and beat it. And here's another one for the chief. It's my report."

"Right you are!"

Through groups of snarling dogs they made their way to the Company's warehouse and Agnew unlocked the door. Lefty Symes, handcuffed, lay huddled in one corner on a pile of hay. There was little to approve in that white, brutal face with its five weeks' growth of beard and the little shifty eyes that looked up at them, blinking in the glare of Agnew's electric torch. The man's spirit was completely broken and he actually cowered as they approached.

Steve questioned him closely concerning his late partner in crime; but Symes could tell him nothing further than he had learned already from

Corporal Agnew. Disgusted, they left him snivelling in the dark, and headed for the boarding house. They nearly collided with a square-shouldered, clean-shaven man who was coming out.

"Dean!" Steve almost shouted. "Dean Fawcett, you old Siwash! What're you doing down here? Doctoring Indians, as usual?" The hand which he extended was seized in a grip of steel and the eyes into which he looked glinted with genuine pleasure at the meeting.

Fawcett was a tall man, lean, wiry, big boned. His hair was tinged with gray; but although his face was lined, his eyes were the keen eyes of a lynx. The northern trails had known him for many a long year—a strange, silent woodsman, Dean Fawcett, whose name was spoken with reverence in humble frontier dwellings where lonely trappers had found him in time of sorrow or need. Among halfbreeds and Indians his fame had travelled every trail. He lived now here, now there, coming and going unexpectedly, always serene, always on some good mission. None knew for sure from whence he came or why he chose to live this hermit life; none cared to risk his anger by asking.

Sergeant Steve Hardy knew him as did few others. Their work had thrown them together on more than one occasion and between them had sprung up a bond of mutual respect that had

ripened to friendship. The disparity in their years had even seemed to attract them to each other, rather than otherwise,—as if in Dean Fawcett the young man had found one to take the place of that father whose wise counsels life had seen fit to deny him.

While Steve and Agnew ate, Fawcett sat at their table, exchanging news. He had just come down from the Herb Lake district and brought with him new stories of mineral wealth to add to the growing rumors. It was while launched in the middle of these that a man slowly entered the room from the stairway and stood nearby, idly rolling a cigarette between long white fingers.

Subconsciously almost, so habitual had it become to him, Sergeant Steve Hardy took in every detail of his appearance, even while apparently paying no attention to him whatever. He was dressed in a tight fitting suit of blue serge, wholly out of keeping in his present environment. From patent leather shoes, which had evidently just been dusted, to the top of his oiled head, he was immaculate. His hair was coal black; his eyes were black and seemed to rove restlessly in survey of the room. His face and hands were so white and soft they looked dead; the only relief to the pallor of his face lay in his dense black eyebrows and a black moustache. The tenderest of tenderfeet—straight from Eastern hives of brick and mortar, pavements and taxicabs!

Steve glanced quickly across at Fawcett, aware all at once that he had ceased talking in the middle of a sentence and sensing something electric in the curious stillness with which he sat. Fawcett's unwinking gaze was fixed upon the stranger, but when Steve turned for a full look at the latter he was surprised to find himself the focus of an equally intent regard; not only that, but it was the same look which had been bent upon him in that very place the day before by Joyce Chetwood's guardian—a startled expression.

"I—I beg your pardon," apologized the man, recovering himself almost immediately. "I thought at first—But of course we have never met before—very foolish of me." He bowed, smiling and showing his white teeth. Then he moved leisurely to the little counter where Mrs. Hayley sold various brands of tobaccos, cigars and cigarettes.

Steve turned to his companions in perplexity.

"Say, am I turning green or anything like that?" he whispered in mock distress. "That's the second time I've been mistaken for somebody else." He told them about Martin Hardy's actions. "What about it, Dean?"

But Fawcett merely smiled slowly and shook his head as if the thing were too trivial for comment. He jerked his eyebrows to indicate that the stranger was coming back again to their table. He proffered them cigars.

"I am just up from the south—New York, to be exact—as you can see," he began, grimacing and glancing down at his clothes. His manner was decidedly French, if his idiom was not. "I made a special trip from the lower Landing and I want to visit a camp belonging to a Mr. Hardy—Martin Hardy, I believe. Do any of you gentlemen know where it is located?"

"Sure. I've just come from there," nodded Steve.

"Good! May I ask if you are returning there to-night? I am so anxious to get there at once—My name is Dureau—Jean Dureau, of Lemaire & Company, New York," and he handed each of them his card as he spoke.

"'Stock-brokers, bonds, investments,'" read Steve from the card in his hand. "That sounds interesting, Mr. Dureau. You are interested in mines?"

"To some extent." He smiled easily. "I don't mind telling you what you will soon know anyway—I am making a deal with Hardy for his claim—I beg your pardon, sir?"

"I said nothing," murmured Fawcett.

"—and I am very anxious to get to the camp to-night if at all possible. I have tried to secure an Indian to guide me, but they are such lazy, indolent dogs—"

"I will guide you," said Fawcett quietly. "But it will take all night to get there—perhaps much

longer, Mr. Dureau. I know that claim well and if you succeed in buying it—" He paused abruptly at the stranger's throaty laugh.

"The deal will go through, never fear. But thanks, my friend, for your offer to guide me. I accept with gratitude. Can we not start at once if it is such a long trip?" He held out his soft white palms. "I am afraid you will not find me anything but excess baggage, sir. But whatever your terms, I will pay."

"Pay? Pay?—Yes, yes, of course," growled Fawcett hastily. "Well, get your things together and we'll vamoose right away," and he shoved back his chair and stood up with the lithe grace of perfect muscles.

The whole thing had been so quickly arranged that Fawcett had bid them adieu and slipped away almost before the two mounted policemen had time to say a word. He asked no questions, made no comment; he just went, silently and efficiently, as was his custom. As Agnew and Steve finished their meal, they saw the New Yorker settle his account with Mrs. Hayley. Then he bustled out, waving a pudgy hand to them as he reached the door.

A few minutes later Sergeant Steve Hardy left Corporal Agnew chatting at the counter and wandered outdoors. He felt unaccountably restless and he took himself sharply to task for his uneasiness. Dean Fawcett knew those lakes bet-

ter than he did and they would have moonlight— But even as he told himself this, he realized that Fawcett's ability to guide the man to the camp was beside the point. It was something in Fawcett's manner—a strained sort of repression—as if he were concealing some hidden emotion— Steve threw off the thought with a gesture of impatience. He was becoming a regular old woman for imagining things. He ought to know Fawcett well enough by this time not to be surprised at anything he did.

He stood for a moment on the edge of the clay-bank and gazed after the departing canoe, already but a black chip on the moon-white water. But the vague feeling of uneasiness remained with him.

CHAPTER V

THE Hardy camp presented a scene of activity when Steve came within sight of it about noon next day. Jonsen and Mangers and even Martin Hardy himself were hard at work, stripping the rocks for inspection. There was no sign of the young ladies—at first; but as the canoe closed in, Steve saw Mangers detach himself from the group on the ridge and make his way to the cabin where he stood in the doorway, talking to Joyce Chetwood. She brought him a dipper from which he drank and as he handed it back to her he reached out and patted her on the shoulder. The girl threw off his hand impatiently and pointed as she caught sight of the canoe.

Sergeant Steve Hardy drove his paddle deep in irritation. He did not like Mangers. Most decidedly he did not like Mangers. And, judging by what he had observed, his familiarities were distasteful to Joyce. The girl ran down to meet him, a glow of honest friendship on her young face. Mangers waited for them, dusty khaki-clad legs apart, hands in his pockets and a look on his sweat-begrimed face that was eloquent of resentment.

“Hello, Sergeant! Back again already? Favor-

ite beauty spot of yours—nice trees, good pasture for the horses and all that!” He grinned aggravatingly.

Mrs. Hayley gave me a relayed telegram to deliver to Mr. Hardy,” said Steve quietly, turning his back.

“A telegram? I hope there is nothing wrong at home,” she said quickly, then smiled. “That’s a woman’s first thought about telegrams, isn’t it? You’ll find daddy up there, actually working. You two go up and I’ll help Dorothy with the dinner. You’re just in time.” Her bright smile was entirely for Steve.

Neither of the young men had much to say as they climbed the ascent to join the others. Steve sensed a silent antagonism in the mining engineer and returned it with interest. It was only when he was exchanging greetings with Mr. Hardy and Gus that he was able to throw off the mood. He handed the telegram to the former and turned to Jonsen.

“I want to have a word with Dean Fawcett, Gus. Where is he?” but Gus only grinned, uncomprehending. “What time did Dureau and Fawcett get here?”

“Sa-ay, young feller—,” began Gus.

“What’s that?” came Maugers’ sharp interruption. “There’s nobody here but us. Did you say ‘Dureau’? What do you mean?”

Steve explained about the meeting at the Land-

ing and the arrangement which the stranger from New York had made with Fawcett to guide him to the Hardy camp. And as he talked the mining engineer's face showed a strange mixture of concern and eagerness.

"Dureau! Well, he sure aint letting the grass grow! But they haven't turned up here. You're sure they were heading this way?"

Martin Hardy thrust the telegram into his pocket and stepped closer. He seemed annoyed at a conversation which he did not understand.

"Who is this Dureau? You say he wanted to see me, Sergeant? Did he say what for?"

"I believe he is making a deal with you for the claim," replied Steve, somewhat surprised.

"What's this mean?" demanded Martin Hardy sharply, rounding on Mangers. "Who is this man, Dureau?"

"Why, he's the man who will buy this claim, if it's worth anything," returned the engineer coolly.

"I will not sell. You know that, Mangers. I will only consider a lease," cried Hardy angrily. "In New York you gave me to understand that you were negotiating with Lemaire & Company—"

"Well, so I was. I did business with Lemaire & Company at your own request. Dureau is a rather eccentric sort of man, or rather his wife is—"

"His wife? What the devil has his wife got to do with it?"

"She's the whole works," smiled Maugers. "It's your own fault if you are not in possession of all the facts. It was your expressed wish that I should conduct all the business while you remained in the background. That's your own affair. It was my business to promote an interest in this property with a view to its development and I did it to the best of my ability by consulting Lemaire & Company. Lemaire is the maiden name of Dureau's wife and she insisted on using it in the business. She has the money anyhow."

Martin Hardy sat down on a rock and mopped his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Dureau—Dureau—maiden name, Lemaire!" he muttered. "Coming here—to—to see me!" He got to his feet again restlessly. "I guess dinner's about ready. I'm going down to wash up."

Steve watched him for a moment, then eyed Maugers keenly; but it was evident that the engineer had no intention of giving out further information. He was more interested in Fawcett's ability to guide Dureau to the camp.

"Dean Fawcett know this lake? Hell!" exploded Gus. "What you t'ink?"

"But where are they? They've had plenty of time to get here long ago, if they left last night."

"How do I know?" growled Gus surlily. "They turn up presen'ly."

Maugers turned on his heel abruptly and went down the hill towards his tent.

"He's a bad actor, that boy," commented Jonsen, scowling after him. "You see how he behave to the old man? Somet'ing wrong, young feller. Dead sure the old man going to sell and the old man dead sure he aint going to sell. You hear him?"

"The claim's valuable, is it, Gus?"

For answer, Jonsen led the way to the patch of ground they had been stripping of moss. He handed up a piece of freak quartz which resembled nothing so much as a lot of little gold beads, fused to a mass. Steve hefted it and handed it back without a word. It seemed to be almost pure gold.

"Lousy with it, young feller," and it was with a thoughtful face that Sergeant Steve Hardy picked his way behind the other down from the ridge.

Martin Hardy ate his dinner in moody silence. So did Maugers for the most part and even Steve found it difficult to cast off a certain constraint. He was glad when the ordeal was over and he was free to depart. On the lakeshore, however, as he said goodbye to Joyce Chetwood he forgot everything but her troubled face.

"I am sorry daddy was such poor company," she apologized. "Something has upset him dreadfully and I intend to find out exactly what it is.

You will come back soon and visit us again? You—you are leaving now to catch the crooks?"

"Crooks?" amused incredulity on his face.

"Please, I do not like pretence," she smiled. "You and daddy were talking yesterday about something you thought I should not hear; so, I pumped him after you left."

Steve chuckled and thought of how Gus had described her—"a reg'lar little devil to butt in." He made light of the task ahead of him, but she reproved his deprecation and her face was serious as she caught hold of his coatsleeve and shook it. Her voice trembled slightly and there was genuine anxiety in the beautiful eyes that looked up at him.

"You—will be very careful?" she pleaded in a low voice. "I—we want you to come back—safe." The color flamed suddenly in her cheeks and before he could say a word, she turned and fled back up the path.

Steve looked down at his fingers in foolish wonder. She had given them a little squeeze and the fact had set his pulses throbbing strangely. His heart felt very light and he sprang into his canoe with a recklessness that almost upset the frail craft. He sent it skimming with deft strokes, finding in the rhythmic swing of his paddle an outlet for the sudden exuberance that possessed him.

No longer was he intrigued with a sense of

nameless mystery entering the northland. He was building castles—glorious castles.

The sun was about half way down its westering arc when Sergeant Hardy reached the first of the islands at the north of the lake. As he was rounding its eastern headland he ceased paddling and listened; to his keen ears on the still air had come a sure sound—the swish of a canoe through the water, propelled by slow, uneven strokes. He knew that was not the way Dean Fawcett used a paddle. Then—

With a few long, noiseless sweeps of his blade, Steve turned the nose of his canoe straight for the shore and ran it in on a little strip of pebbles behind some sheltering rocks. He stepped out quietly and with a brief inspection of his service automatic, he slipped into the underbrush. With a rifle in his possession Red Lewis was a very real danger; for there seemed little reason to doubt that the man was desperate and would shoot on sight. Alert and eager, intent now only upon the discharge of his duty, the young officer stole to a point of vantage, cautiously parted the bushes and waited.

There was a silence. A little bird flitted past and settled idly on a piece of dry driftwood. The sound of unsteady paddling came again and in a few minutes the white shape of a birch-bark canoe swung into sight, burbling along, limned against

the distant brownish-green background of a neighboring island.

Steve started. He knew that canoe; it was Fawcett's. He watched the heavy figure at the stern, incongruous, ludicrous. At the end of each five or six strokes the figure lurched forward, the hand grasping the paddle dragging backward, paddle floating idly. It was Dureau, the New Yorker!

Steve straightened, easing his tense muscles, and, cupping his hands, shouted. The man waved laxly and managed clumsily to change his course. Steve ran along the shore to meet him, leaping from rock to rock.

"What's the matter?" he called. "What's happened? Where's Fawcett?"

To his rapid-fire questions the once immaculate Mr. Jean Dureau, of New York, offered no immediate reply. He could only look up dully through heavy, reddened lids and slowly shake his head with the physical lassitude of a man whose energies are about spent. A black bruise showed on his right cheek; the backs of his hands were scratched by berry bushes and the palms were blistered with the amount of unaccustomed paddling he had done. As soon as he was helped ashore he stretched out with a groan and closed his eyes.

Steve eyed him for a moment with a strong feeling of repugnance, then caught him roughly

by the shoulder and shook him until he cried out in protest.

"Now, answer me. What's happened and where's Fawcett?"

"I hired him to guide me to the Hardy place, didn't I? You were there, officer. Heluva guide!—got lost—then there was a hold-up—!" He shuddered.

"What do you mean—a hold-up?" demanded Steve quickly, his eyes gleaming with sudden comprehension. "Good heavens! you mean Red Lewis?"

"Ugliest brute I ever saw," nodded Dureau, gathering eagerness in the realization that this was police authority to whom he was speaking. "Ah, yes, he was red—very red, by—! He had a gun and we ran right into him. He beat us up."

"What? Both of you? Where's Fawcett? Speak, man!"

"Back there—Fawcett—done for, I guess. There was liquor in my grip—he got it—very drunk—I slipped away—Thank God I've met you."

Steve's eyes blazed and he grabbed Dureau by the coat-collar and yanked him to his feet.

"You slipped away, eh? — left Fawcett, wounded, at the mercy of that thug? Is that right?"

"Now, see here, officer, I'm telling you I got

away and started for help. I wasn't carrying a revolver. What else could I do?" he whined.

Steve released his hold and in answer to his sharp questions Dureau managed to convey some idea of the location of the island where he and Fawcett had landed during the night—and had come to grief at the hands of the outlaw. As soon as he had this information, Steve ran for his canoe and had shoved out on the water before Dureau realized that he was about to be deserted. He came stumbling over the rocks, crying aloud in protest, wringing his hands, gesticulating helplessly.

"What's going to happen to me?" he wailed.

"Listen, you!" came the steely voice. "That's something nobody but yourself is going to worry about just now. I've got something else to do. You can stay here till I come back this way or you can get back into that canoe and keep going till you hit the camp you're looking for. If you keep west till you're around this island, then strike straight south, you can't miss it. Do as you damn well please!"

Without another word or a single backward glance, Sergeant Hardy bent to his paddle, his anxiety over Fawcett's safety lending strength to the tireless strokes which sped him away into unknown hazards.

CHAPTER VI

THE ridge behind the Hardy cabin reached its highest point at the shore of the lake where it dropped sheer to the water in a jagged cliff of rock. An isolated grove of splendid fir trees graced the summit of this natural lookout and here beneath the shelter of their fragrant branches a rustic bench had been constructed at the special request of Joyce Chetwood. It was a favorite spot to which she was in the habit of retiring with her sewing or a book when she wished to be alone with her thoughts, with those dreams to which a young woman of her age and temperament is given on occasion.

The view of the lake from this vantage point was a vista of natural beauty of which the girl never tired. Many a happy hour had she spent in her eyrie, lost in day-dreams over which the fir trees nodded and whispered approval. The ever changing lights upon the water robbed the scene of monotony and here this strange child of the North seemed to sense the fact that she was kindred of the wilderness. Encompassed by primeval solitude, her thoughts followed many strange trails into the past that shrouded in nebulous folds the mystery of her life's begin-

nings. At such times she experienced depths of yearning of which she had not thought herself capable—an overpowering longing for the parents she had never known.

That she was an orphan and that Martin Hardy was but her foster father, she had known always. Many times had he answered her eager questions as well as he could—with a wistful sadness that he could not tell her all she wished to know. Her father, George Chetwood, had gone to the Klondike during the gold stampede of '98, foolishly taking along his wife and baby girl. He had hoped to make his fortune, but it was misfortune which dogged his steps instead. Finally both parents had been taken sick with scurvy and were in a helpless condition when Martin Hardy chanced to call at the little cabin on his way out of Dawson. The miner felt that both he and his wife were dying and he insisted upon Martin Hardy taking the baby girl away with him. He had agreed to find a good home for the little one and he had managed to get word to Dawson of conditions at the isolated Chetwood cabin. Hardy himself was on urgent business which compelled him to go on and later when he made enquiries he had been informed that both the little girl's parents had succumbed. Meanwhile, he had become so attached to the child that he decided to adopt Joyce and in the Hardy home at Montreal she had grown up as one of the family.

That was all. No family history or connections—no people of her own. George Chetwood, apparently was but a nomad among nomads, minding his own business so well that none could say where he came from or what were his antecedents. Her guardian's advertisements in the newspapers of the day likewise had been unproductive of information and with the passing years Joyce had come to accept the situation at its face value. Certainly the love and care bestowed upon her by her foster parents had been as genuine as they had bestowed upon their own daughter, Dorothy, and had been reciprocated in kind.

The one inheritance that had come to her out of that dim past was this half forgotten claim in Northern Manitoba, staked out by George Chetwood years before on one of his many prospecting trips. And because it was her one bequest, the girl cherished it, loved it. It was *hers*!

Curled up on the rustic seat beneath the firs, chin cupped in her hand, it was a troubled gaze which Joyce Chetwood bent southward after the departing canoe on this sunny afternoon. The relayed telegram from Briscoe, her guardian's Winnipeg broker, had been of such importance that the request for his presence at the prairie metropolis as soon as possible could not be ignored. He had explained the situation to her at some length, evidently anxious to go, yet reluctant to leave the two girls behind. To his

suggestion that they accompany him on the hurried journey neither of them would listen and at last after a lengthy talk with Gus, who was to remain behind in charge of the camp, Martin Hardy and Maugers had set out for the Landing.

Joyce had been quick to sense the feeling between the two men. There had been high words, she knew, and it had not taken her long to get at the cause of her guardian's dissatisfaction with Maugers' New York negotiations. Sell the claim? That certainly had never been intended and her own indignation had grown as she learned that a man by the name of Dureau, representing the New York interests, was even then on his way to the camp with the avowed purpose of inspecting her claim for purchase. Maugers' brazen attitude only tended to increase her resentment; but he seemed to think he had done a good stroke of business in their behalf and the least that could be done was to talk it over with the New York man when he got there.

The failure of Dureau to put in an appearance was worrying the mining-engineer considerably until the suggestion was made that probably Fawcett had found the going too rough the night before and had put back to the Landing. Maugers at once accepted Hardy's further suggestion that Maugers accompany him as far as the Landing and, if Dureau were there, they could talk business without further delay.

Joyce had waved a cheery goodbye with Dorothy; but at the first opportunity she had slipped away to her favorite nook. She wanted to think. She was puzzled by an unwonted nervousness in her guardian's manner. To one who did not know him well, he might appear entirely unperturbed; but not to her who understood his every mood. Perhaps he was afraid she would blame him for allowing Maugers too much latitude in the New York negotiations—for turning the trip, in fact, into a pleasure jaunt while the mining-engineer transacted the business. They certainly had had a wonderful time in that wonderful metropolis! The few days at their disposal had flown before they knew it, there was so much to see. And the shopping she had done! She could not find it in her heart to blame him when he had taken such keen delight in her pleasure.

For half an hour the girl's mind wandered in pleasant retrospect, then off to the north she noticed an approaching canoe with a single occupant. Her heart leaped at the thought that perhaps it was the young sergeant of the Royal Mounted returning; but disappointment quickly subdued the flush in her cheeks as she studied the distant canoe. It was an Indian birch-bark, paddled in a strange manner, as she could see. She watched its slow progress for a time, puzzled at the queer behavior of the craft. Then the truth

flashed upon her; it must be the stranger from New York. In some excitement she picked up her fancy-work and started down the steep descent to apprise Gus of her discovery.

When the nose of Dureau's canoe finally touched shore the city man was in such a state of collapse that Jonsen had to lift him ashore and almost carry him up the path. His arms hung listlessly at his sides. On their way to the cabin Gus informed him at least three times that he had in very truth reached the Hardy camp before the man ceased his parrot-like enquiry. At sight of the two girls standing in the doorway the New Yorker made an effort to pull himself together. He stopped, plucking the guide's shirtsleeve in anxious hesitation.

"Martin Hardy, I want . . . in there?"

"He aint here, I told you. But them's his two girls. Buck up, man!"

"Maugers—?"

"Gone over to the Landin' with the old man," vouchsafed Gus. "Say, if your name's Dureau, Mister, I's to tell you Maugers'll be back here to-morrow."

Dureau stood for a moment, dull with weariness, and nodded in a tired way. Then as Joyce came towards them he rallied sufficiently to attempt some show of courtesy as he proffered her his card, told her who he was. The hint of admiration in his gaze was not lost upon the girl

who flushed under his appraisal as she extended the hospitality of the camp.

"I apologize for my appearance, mademoiselle. I must have sleep and refreshment as I have not slept or eaten since last night. I—I have had one terrible time—" His voice faltered.

"You went out with Dean Fawcett," stated Gus. "Where's he?"

"Back there," and he waved vaguely towards the north. "I guess he is dead."

Startled, they questioned him closely and learned of the encounter with "Red" Lewis in which Fawcett and Dureau had come to grief at the hands of the outlaw.

"I got away to try to get help—met the young policeman and he directed me how to get here—told him all about it and he's gone after the thug."

The girl's alarmed eyes sought Gus Jonsen's bronzed face which was set in such stern lines that she did not speak. Instead her cheeks burned quickly at the newcomer's petulant command that he be ministered to without further delay.

"We will talk later—of many important things; but first, I must eat. I must sleep."

"Show him Mr. Mauger's tent, Gus," she said quietly and hurried away to the kitchen without another word or look.

Gus complied with a non-committal grunt and when he had pointed out the tent, turned on his heel and left the unwelcome guest to his own re-

sources. It was plain that Mr. Jean Dureau, of New York, was not at all to his liking and his brows were knit in a puzzled frown and occasionally he muttered to himself as he went about his work. Presently he threw down his shovel and strode directly across to the tent. As he stuck his head inside he was greeted by a long snore. The once dapper Mr. Jean Dureau, lay sprawled on the camp cot where he had thrown himself; the flabby, unshaven cheeks hung pendulous, mouth agape, and Gus studied this product of the cities with considerable curiosity, not unmixed with contempt. He was tempted to kick him into wakefulness.

He thought better of it, however, and made his way to the cabin to inform Joyce that the stranger in their midst would need nothing to eat for hours to come.

"Dead to the world," he reported with a grin, "snorin' like a pig—"

The girl came slowly towards him, her eyes sober with anxiety as she tried to glean from his expression the assurance which she was far from feeling.

"Oh, Gus," she murmured in low tones, glancing over her shoulder to make sure that Dorothy was out of earshot, "do you think he will be safe?"

"Now, missy, I knowed you was worryin' over t'at. Sa-ay I've knowed that boy for a long

whiles an' he's a devil of a straight shot. Sure, Steve's all right an' he'll be back sure as shootin' with his duty did. He knows his business an' he aint goin' to get hurt by no cheap city crook. Why sa-ay, maam, don't you go gettin' me started, tellin' 'bout the things that boy's done—"

"Won't you come inside for a minute, Gus. Dorothy has just finished some fresh doughnuts— You may have a few if you don't think it'll spoil your appetite for supper."

Gus grinned with the delight of an overgrown boy. With tongue in cheek he promptly followed Miss Joyce Chetwood to the region of doughnuts and Romance.

CHAPTER VII

MEAL time came and went, dishes were washed and the lights went out for the night while the man from New York slept on like a log where he had thrown himself in exhaustion. Jonsen did not go near the tent to tuck him in for the night; but even the cold in the middle of the night did not awaken him and preparations for breakfast were under way the following morning before the sleeper bestirred himself, stiff and sore. With many groans and much muttered profanity he roused to the fact that he was ravenously hungry and the odor of coffee in the air inspired him to the necessary effort to make himself presentable. He besought hot water from Gus for shaving and when at last he showed up at the cabin he had regained something of his customary poise with the grooming he had given himself.

It was lucky that the girls had made ample provision for the prodigious appetite which Mr. Jean Dureau exhibited or there would have been nothing left of that breakfast for the rest of them. And as the meal progressed it was apparent that the stranger was rapidly recovering his spirits.

He pushed back from the table at last with a sigh of satisfaction and lighted a cigarette.

"Good enough, Miss Hardy. Feel a lot better. Don't know when I've eaten so much. This northern air, eh, Miss Hardy?" He nodded and smiled ingratiatingly. It needed no deep experience for Joyce to note the blatant arrogance of the man's nature.

There had been no formal introductions between them and she corrected his mistake in her name, explaining that Dorothy's father had adopted her. She was entirely unprepared for the effect which her simple statement had upon this stranger in whose presence she felt diffident, uncomfortable.

"Chetwood, did you say? Chetwood?" The cigarette hung on his lip while he almost gaped at her, a new interest growing in his small black eyes. "Good Lord!"

"You appear to recognize the name," prompted Joyce in surprise. "Someone of your acquaintance perhaps?"

"I—Pardon me, Miss Chetwood, but were you at any time in the Klondike—the Yukon, you know?" He spoke rapidly and hung upon her answer with ill concealed eagerness.

"Yes, but I was only a baby then. I cannot remember. My father and mother died there and—Why do you ask?"

"And it was there Hardy picked you up and brought you out with him, eh? I see. I see."

"Yes. You know him—my guardian, Mr. Hardy?" She studied the strange gleam that seemed to lurk in his eyes, behind his smile.

"Know him? Yes, I know him," and Dureau laughed a little. "We should be able to talk over old times when he gets back from this sudden trip of his—He did go away rather hurriedly yesterday, didn't he?" he demanded, standing up. "But, of course, he didn't know I was coming all the way from New York specially to see him—very specially to see him. Well, it can't be helped. I'll just have to wait here for him."

"He will be glad to see an old friend, I'm sure," said Joyce bravely. "The fishing is excellent around here and Gus knows all the best places. Game of all kinds is plentiful and the season opens soon now. Please make yourself at home, Mr. Dureau."

"Thanks, I'll do that. I like good fishing and I think I'll find it here. Going to take a walk now. Good morning, Miss Chetwood. I promise you not to miss my dinner."

From the doorway she watched him saunter across to where Gus had started his day's work. Who was this man who claimed to have known Martin Hardy of old and to have come all the way from New York on purpose to see him? She had never heard her guardian mention his name

until that very day and then only as a financial emissary, seeking to buy the mine. She had gathered that Martin Hardy had no intention of doing business with him. Dureau was under the impression that Hardy was unaware of his approach; but her guardian had known and had gone away notwithstanding. He would hardly have done that to an old friend—would hardly have been so disturbed—

She saw that Gus scarcely looked up from his work when Dureau addressed him. The guide was no adept at concealing his feelings and she sensed from his manner that he resented the presence of the stranger at the camp. Why? Now, the New Yorker was going on, evidently intending to inspect the property in a casual way. Gus leaned on his shovel to watch him, then resumed his work with a vigor which was eloquent of irritation. Why should Gus act like that—unless—the talk with Hardy—

She dismissed her speculation as idle and turned back to the kitchen, annoyed at the vague misgivings which possessed her.

Maugers reached the camp about noon, greeting Dureau with boisterous familiarity. They went off together immediately, climbing the ridge to examine the outcroppings and returning in answer to the dinner call with cheerful looks. They ate heartily, laughing much over Gus Jonson's silence under the occasional banter which

they directed at him. Even Joyce at last grew resentful of the assurance with which they carried themselves and she was glad when the meal was over and the pair disappeared inside Mangers' tent.

"Why did he leave just as I arrive? This relayed telegram he got—it was genuine?"

"Genuine? Sure, it was genuine," Mangers replied.

"Has it occurred to you that there might be—other reasons?"

"I've told you already he won't sell—went right up in the air—" Mangers, lying sprawled on the blankets, suddenly propped himself on an elbow and stared wonderingly. "Say, what're you coming at?"

The city man, groomed, sleek, pale of face, smiled tolerantly at the mining engineer, huge, unkempt, brick red from sun and wind. He coughed deprecatingly and for a moment eyed the other in solemn silence.

"Mangers . . . do you realize that we have reached a crisis; that our resources are about petered out . . . ?" and the recipient of this startling news sat up quickly.

"You mean—the firm?" he breathed and Dureau nodded. Mangers swore. His eyes hardened as he got slowly to his feet. "And my money—all of it—You understand, Dureau, *all* of

it—what about that?" He laid a heavy hand on the Frenchman's shoulder and his grip was painful. "Come across with an explanation and no lying with me. What have you done with the money? What's your wife done with it, more like? She's the spender. She thinks the coin she put in fourteen years ago will last forever. Hell!" He laughed harshly.

"Not so fast, Mangers!" He was still smiling. "I said our resources were *almost* played out. That was before you told me about our friend, Hardy, and this mine up here in the woods. Now everything is lovely."

"You mean you can persuade old Hardy to sell when he positively—" Mangers laughed sceptically. "You don't know the old duffer. He's no child."

"Ah, but I do know him—many years ago. He will sell—to me—and on my own terms—or, I should say, the Chetwood girl will sell the claim to me; it's registered in her name. She is very affectionate, is she not? She would not see her guardian in trouble, I am sure—dire trouble. I am very glad indeed that he is away from here. You understand?"

Mangers did understand. He knew Dureau and avarice grew in his small eyes.

"You know something," he nodded, smiles wreathing his heavy face.

"Many things—yes," admitted the New

Yorker, accepting his partner's admiration with a show of modesty. "I make it my business to know. I have been here but a little while, but I continue to know more. It will take a while to think out, but already I have plans. You will act as I say and all will be well with us. Now, I wish to know just how old Hardy acted when you mentioned my name. He recognized it maybe?"

"Did he?" Mangers laughed shortly. "Say, he was scared stiff, and when I mentioned your wife—"

"My wife!" Dureau's eyes widened with a new expression.

"Sure. Soon as I mentioned the firm's name was really her name, Miriam Lemaire, it put the topper on. He nearly curled up and died."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing much—just faded out of the conversation and washed up for dinner."

Dureau was silent for a few moments, as if conquering some inner disturbance of his poise. He wet his lips.

"It is nothing" he murmured. "When it is time for you to know I will tell you the story."

"I bet there's a woman in it," Mangers grinned knowingly. "I bet—" He paused at the quick return of that fleeting expression on Dureau's face.

"Never mind about that," the other commanded hoarsely. "Keep your mouth shut! Keep it shut first, last and always! You understand,

Maugers?" His voice had risen and the engineer nodded, watching him with a new interest.

"Ease up!" he cautioned in a whisper. "Someone coming."

It was Gus Jonsen. He thrust head and shoulders through the flap of the tent, staring from one to the other until Dureau at last demanded irritably what he wanted. Gus grinned, but said nothing.

"Get out of here!" snapped Dureau. "Get busy at your own business, my man!"

Gus, who had stepped inside the tent, paused in the act of filling a sociable pipe. He was not accustomed to this form of address and for a moment he gaped. Then he roared:

"Who the hell you t'ink you talkin' to?"

Dureau's black eyes glowed in his white face, boring him through.

"My man Maugers here has engaged you. In future you will take orders from me. Understand?"

Gus blinked. His first impression must have been right. The man was a crook. All men who looked and talked as he did were crooks in the eyes of the guide. He swore sarcastically.

"I'm takin' orders from Miss Joyce an' nobody else," he asserted loudly and just then a shadow flickered on the canvas, the tent flap opened and the girl stood before them, drawn

to her slender height with face flushed and eyes bright with courage.

"What is the trouble?" she asked.

"Aw, he was butting in on us and we asked him to get out. That's all. He got sore." It was Mangers who spoke and his loose-lipped mouth was drawn in anger.

"Yeh, an' I'll butt in again when I like. The old man talked to me an' what he says goes around here. Miss Joyce is my boss an' you fellers can go to hell!"

"Gus!" Joyce reproved sharply.

But Jonsen brushed past her, his face red with anger. She could hear him crashing through the brush outside as he strode away and for a moment she studied the expression of the two men. Undoubtedly Gus had made enemies of them. At a sign from Dureau the mining engineer dropped back on the cot in silence, his little eyes glowing up at the girl, who presently backed out of the tent without another word. As the flap closed behind her she could hear a chuckle and as she turned towards the cabin she stifled her apprehensions by sheer will power; Dorothy, pale faced was waiting for her in the doorway.

"What was the matter, Joyce?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, nothing. Gus got into some argument with them."

"I don't like them. I'm afraid of them," the younger girl whispered.

"Don't be a little goose!" cried Joyce severely. Then she smiled and placed an arm reassuringly about the other's slim waist.

But when she had a moment to herself in which to think over the incident her face was sober enough. Only too well she realized their position. Gus at loggerheads with the other two made it infinitely worse. Jonsen was altogether reliable, she knew — headstrong, impatient but altogether to be depended upon. He must have had some good reason for his behavior and she decided to see him and get an explanation.

But Gus was absent during the evening meal. Dureau and Maugers remarked upon his absence with some curiosity. It was a trying ordeal for Joyce Chetwood and she was glad when it was over and the men had gone; for beneath their superficial manners towards her she sensed an assurance which was cause for disquietude.

"I think you had better call Gus, Dolly," she said at last and as they went together to the door they saw the guide emerging from his tent.

"Supper all over, missie?" he grinned cheerfully as he crunched across to the cabin.

"We've saved yours. But hurry up, Gus. We want you to take us fishing."

Their smiles met. As he ate, Joyce waited on him, admiring his great square, smiling face—


the thick throat that sloped down into muscular shoulders. He stood between them and trouble, she thought, and she was sure that in his own rough way the woodsman liked her. It gave her a certain satisfaction to know that.

Preparations for the evening's fishing were soon made and Jonsen sat smoking and watching the two girls with sleeves rolled up washing the dishes. His eyes, lingering upon Joyce Chetwood's sunny beauty, were alight with good humor; for he sensed that this slim whip of a girl approved of him, that she trusted him, and his heart was glad.

When the three stepped from the cabin, armed with fishing tackle, it was dusk. A light in the tent occupied by the other two residents of the camp threw grotesque shadows of their moving bodies on the canvas, and the murmur of their voices was indistinct. At the water's edge Gus steadied the canoe as the girls stepped in.

"Good fishing to-night, Missie," he remarked cheerfully.

The girl smiled as she looked up at the scudding clouds through which a fugitive moon occasionally gleamed. For perhaps half an hour Jonsen paddled them northward, keeping close to the rocky shore. Finally he pulled in under the shelter of a huge mass of rock which jutted out into the lake. The three piled out of the canoe and the lines were soon in readiness. Joyce made no



immediate move to use hers; instead, she drew Gus aside.

"What did you mean when you said that daddy had given you to understand that you were not to work for Mr. Mangers?"

Jonsen made out that he did not hear and while the girl was pulling on her waders she repeated the question.

"I want to know, Gus," she insisted, making a cast.

"Well, missie, the old man—your dad, he's pretty mad at them two crooks. He said I was to look after you . . ." he rumbled grudgingly.

"But what right have you to call them 'crooks'? Are they?"

"You bet your life!" Gus snorted. "Hey, missie, look out! You've hooked one!"

A splash, not fifteen feet away, was followed by the whirl of the reel as the trout plunged for deep water. In the shadows Dorothy was standing on her toes, her small hands beating together in her excitement as the humming of the reel and the steady clicking of the winding alternated. The trout was game and fought hard, but Joyce stuck to him, playing him well. She had waded out, almost to the waist now, and it was all she could do to keep track of the dynamic energy on the end of her line.

"Take your time, missie," cautioned Gus, wading out beside her, on the alert for any accident.

He saw that the trout was tiring and soon the girl gasped:

"Net! Net!"

It was a ticklish moment, but she negotiated it successfully with a cry of delight.

"Isn't he a whopper? Dolly, look! How much will he weigh, Gus?"

"I guess 'bout t'ree or four pounds," grinned Gus as he helped her back to shore.

The three were gathered about the catch, examining it in the failing light, when through the silence came a low whistle.

"What was that?" cried Dorothy, clutching Joyce's arm. They breathlessly faced the water in the direction from which the sound had seemed to come.

"Hello, there!" called Jonsen.

"That you, Gus?" and at sound of the familiar voice the girl's heart leaped. Out of the blackness in front of them slid the dim shape of a canoe; it bumped gently against the first rocks and was held there with the paddle.

"Gus, come here," called Sergeant Steve Hardy softly. "No, ma'am, stay where you are please—just Gus."

The guide was already wading out. She saw him bend to look into the canoe. She heard the involuntary oath that escaped him in a hoarse whisper.

CHAPTER VIII

“**W**HAT has happened? It is Mr. Fawcett! Tell me—is he dead?”—her voice, high pitched, with a note of terror near at hand. Up to her knees in water now, hands clasped to her breast, she awaited the answer with brown eyes wide in trepidation.

“Fawcett has been pretty badly beaten up, ma’am; but I do not think it is as bad as he looks.”

“We must get him to camp at once,” she said, wading towards the canoe. In the face of the practical need, she was suddenly calm, efficient. “Steady the canoe, Gus.”

“What are you going to do?” Steve questioned anxiously.

“I am going with you in this canoe.”

Ignoring all protests, her short skirt dripping, she stepped adroitly into the canoe and proceeded at once to saturate a handkerchief in cold lake water and bathe ever so gently the fevered, battered face of the man lying prone in the bottom. He made no attempt to move, but a little moan of gratitude came from his swollen lips.

Without another word, Sergeant Hardy shoved on his paddle. As the party neared the camp

the moon broke slowly from behind a band of heavy clouds and lighted the way. There was no lantern burning in Mauger's tent as they carried Fawcett slowly and carefully to Jonsen's tent beyond.

Gus lit a lantern and by its dim rays surveyed the battered face while he struggled to control the atavistic promptings aroused by sight of the bruises and cuts. The long iron-grey hair was stiff with hardened blood. Fawcett opened his eyes and the faintest of smiles flickered at his thickened lips.

"'Lo, Gus. Don't worry—be all right," he muttered.

Joyce came in with warm water and such simple dressings as the camp possessed. At her touch Fawcett again opened his eyes, his body quivering in a nervous agony; but she soothed him in soft murmurs of sympathy until he realized that a girl was tending him and that she was very gentle and beautiful. Her presence, her very touch, seemed to sign its way into his understanding. He sighed and ground his teeth against outcry.

Jonsen, still muttering to himself, had left the tent; but Steve stood and watched, again conscious of an almost irresistible desire to take the girl in his arms. Where else under heaven could a woman be found so lovely and lovable? The great mass of her hair, untidy now from the ex-

citement but nonetheless beautiful, fell about the creamy neck and shoulders, the rays of the lantern filtering through it and creating its own halo about the tender piquant face. The lightness of perfect health graced her movements. She was very feminine, even to the little gasps of dismay as she discovered some new gash in the patient's battered head.

Almost soundlessly she worked and at last with a breath of satisfaction she drew back and surveyed the result. Then she seemed to become aware of the onlooker's presence for the first time. Their eyes met and they smiled.

"Red Lewis did it. I will get him to-morrow," said Steve simply and quietly. "You have been more than kind in doing this, ma'am, and now you must get some rest yourself. I delayed moving Fawcett until I had given him first-aid, but this—he will be greatly improved by morning. . . . See, he is already dropping into a sound sleep. Fine!"

He gave her his hand, opened the flap of the tent for her. Their fingers lingered. Outside the moon was clear of clouds and flooding the scene with light. As they approached the cabin Steve caught a glimpse of Gus Jonsen, sitting on a rock, limned stern and brooding against the moon on the water.

"Good-night, ma'am, I expect I shall be gone before you wake in the morning. Fawcett is a

good man and worthy of our best care and friendship. I know he is in better hands than mine now and I thank you again for your kindness."

The girl's eyes softened as she looked up at him. Her smile claimed comradeship.

"Don't call me that . . . I don't like it," she pouted whimsically.

"What?" he blurted, startled.

"'Ma'am' . . . My name is Joyce; names are to call people by." Her small hand was lost in his big fist, her gaze locked in his. "Good-night, —Steve!" she cried softly, a note of mischief in her voice, and she was gone.

For about a minute Sergeant Steve Hardy, of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, stood gazing at the closed door, the victim of confused thought. He glanced around him at length and the sight of Jonsen, waiting for him down by the lake, brought him back to earth with a jolt. He moved quickly towards the water.

"Well, Gus, old man," he commenced, sitting down and drawing out pipe and tobacco, "where is Mr. Hardy?" It was not the subject that he knew the guide was brooding over.

"Went to Winnipeg—business call—that there telegraph you fetched—" He turned deliberately. "What you goin' to do, young feller?" he asked grimly.

"Get him—to-morrow."

The Swede grunted. He swore. He spat expressively.

"Frog-legs says him and you met up . . ."

"I followed his directions," Steve nodded. "I found Fawcett—alone, unconscious. Canoe gone—no sign of Lewis. Place all scattered around with empty whisky bottles. Quite evident what had happened. It was Dureau's whisky—got Red drunk, then took Fawcett's canoe and skipped out, leaving Dean to take care of himself—Fawcett already knocked out in a fight with Lewis—before Red got drunk, that was. Dureau says he was unarmed and was going for help; but why didn't he take Fawcett with him? Red would have finished Fawcett if he'd shown any signs of life . . ."

Jonsen muttered deep imprecations as he pondered. Then suddenly he exploded:

"What the hell they doin' 'way up there? Fawcett knows this here lake. He was headin' f'r here. What the . . .!" He pushed a huge, calloused fist under his old felt hat and scrambled his crisp hair in perplexity.

But Steve could only shake his head. It was a phase of the affair which had puzzled him, too. Fawcett had not been able to tell him very clearly—or had Fawcett been deliberately silent? He wondered, recalling Fawcett's manner at the Landing. Now that Gus had voiced it, its sig-

nificance amazed him. What had taken the pair so far north of their destination?

"There's something damned funny going on around here, Gus. This Dureau knows something about it. What do you think?"

"I knew he was a crook. I told Miss Joyce t'at!" Gus said, a certain grim pleasure in his voice.

"What did you have to tell her that for?" Steve demanded quickly.

"None o' your damned business, young feller!" grinned Jonsen, getting to his feet; but instantly Steve swung up beside him and caught him by the shoulder.

"Listen, Gus!" he commanded soberly. "I'm off early in the morning. I'm relying on you to look after her—the girls. Their position here—"

Jonsen chuckled. He stretched his huge muscles and chuckled again.

"I'm here, young feller!" he growled, and made for his tent. "G'night."

* * * * *

When Sergeant Hardy opened the flap of his little tent the crisp chill of the morning air acted upon him like a tonic. There was a hint of frost in the tang of it and he realized that the short summer was practically fled; the fly season had been past for many weeks, the rapid growth of vegetation had long since reached fruition and

here and there a touch of yellow, russet and crimson showed in the undergrowth, harbingers of the fleetness of seasons in the North. It seemed but yesterday that the last of the ice had disappeared from the lakes; it would be but to-morrow that the inland waters would be edged with shell ice. Meanwhile the berry patches still clung to the last of their clusters.

His sleep had been heavy and troubled and he went down to the lake to clear his muddled brain with cold water. Day was just breaking; the yellow and red of the sun streaked the sky, bringing into bold silhouette the trunks of the forest surrounding him. He hauled his canoe into the water and went back for his tent and duffle. It was not till then that he noted smoke ascending from the cabin chimney and the door standing open. As he stared in some surprise the aroma of coffee reached him and presently his wondering gaze rested on Joyce Chetwood, who came to the door and beckoned to him. In her simple gingham dress she looked very appealing and he went towards her with face alight.

"Good-morning, ma'am—Miss Joyce, I mean. I do hope I didn't waken you. It is very early. I've been as quiet as I could," he said, struggling for something nice to say to her that would not sound altogether inane.

She smiled at his correction in addressing her and shook her head.

"You didn't waken me, even if you did make no end of fuss when you were washing." Steve only grinned. "I have breakfast ready for you."

"Breakfast," he echoed. He had not expected that; he had intended to breakfast on the trail later on. His browned face flushed with pleasure at her thoughtfulness. Here was a girl!

"And see, isn't this real good of you—for a snapshot?"

He looked earnestly at the little kodak print which she handed to him—the one Dorothy had taken with Joyce "spoiling the picture" over his shoulder. Spoiling the picture! As he looked at the girl's beautiful likeness he wondered if she guessed his feelings. For that matter, he wondered himself where he was drifting to.

"Yes, it's a dandy—of you." As he smiled down at her his face was warm with feeling and he knew that he loved her. "May I keep this, please?" His request was so simple and his expression so serious that the girl laughed self-consciously.

"Yes,—if you like it as much as—all that . . ."

A pause, during which both stood silent.

"What will you do with it?" she asked.

"Delay departure long enough to write a letter—to my mother. I'll enclose this. I—you would like my mother," he assured her simply.

"I—I am sure that I would!" she exclaimed and to cover up her sudden blush—"Let me get

you pen and paper—but breakfast first, sir, if you don't mind. Everything's ready."

He found the table set for two—out in the kitchen. With the door closed and voices modulated—in order not to disturb Dorothy—they ate the delightful breakfast she had prepared—tête-à-tête. Afterwards she brought him writing materials and he wrote to his mother.

His thoughts wandered as he wrote. Why had her guardian gone off and left her alone like this? Even Gus could not be around all the time—it wasn't right. It was only when he came to describe to his mother his feeling for this girl that he could think clearly. He could feel himself flushing as the words went down on paper and he glanced up hastily to see if she was watching him.

But she was standing in the doorway in the gathering sunlight. He carefully enclosed the snapshot, sealed the envelope and addressed it, then crossed the room on tip toe and silently gave it to her.

"There's no hurry 'bout getting this off," he murmured. "Any time Maugers and Dureau are going to the Landing will do. Gus is pretty busy these days and I wouldn't bother him about it."

She glanced up at him quickly as they strolled together towards his canoe. The smile had fled suddenly from her face. She caught his hand in a quick surge of anxiety.

"I've been trying to—to persuade myself that there is nothing—nothing wrong," she said jerkily. "But sometimes—I shall be anxious about you on this trip," she finished.

He stopped and looked at her for a moment.

"If that were all—," he began. "Pshaw, I'll be all right and I'll be back here on the double-quick. I promise you that. You are afraid of these two men?" he asked directly. "Why?"

"I—I don't know why," she admitted. "I think it must be because of daddy. I'm beginning to wonder if they have some hold over him. And I cannot tell you why I wonder *that*, either. It is just a foolish notion that keeps coming into my head."

"I will stay—"

"No, no!" she protested and a queer thrill shot through him at her earnestness, the pressure of her soft fingers. "You must do your duty. I—it is all right. There is nothing to worry over—except your safe return."

He laughed at her apprehensions and they parted more gayly. Yet when he had given a final wave of his paddle, his face was stern and set as he turned it definitely to the north. And back on the island shore the girl stood with fingers locked tightly as she gazed after him. Her eyes filled.

"God keep us both safe," she whispered.

CHAPTER IX

THE practised eye of a competent physician would have glowed with satisfaction at the wonderful improvement in the condition of the battered Fawcett as the result of healing lotions and a night of unbroken rest. The old woodsman was a thin and leathery individual with a constitution built up by years of clean living in the open; the abrasions on his face and head, therefore, were a very misleading barometer of the unimpaired strength which he held in reserve. As he lay alone in the guide's tent, watching the play of sunshine and shadow upon the canvas and listening to the carols of the birds, he smiled strangely to himself—as if the circumstances in which he found himself this bright morning were entirely satisfying. He had just finished a cautious testing of his muscles and beyond an occasional sore spot, entirely to be expected, his private inventory assured him that he was as good as ever.

A strange man, this Fawcett—silent, almost taciturn, with deep-set inscrutable eyes that looked from beneath shaggy brows with penetrating directness at times. Men of the North who had known him for years had long ago given up

trying to understand his ways; a shake of the head went with mention of his name because of his eccentricities.

Just this morning Gus Jonsen had had a sample of it when Fawcett quietly and seriously had asked the Swede to shave him as well as possible—where the skin was not broken. A man with a face in that condition and wanting a shave! It was too much for the simple guide to fathom. Yet there had been something in Fawcett's eye—Gus had done the best he could without further comment.

Fawcett was much better this morning, Gus realized and was glad. Much better. Yet when the New York visitor—this man Dureau—the nerve of him, coming into that tent, spic and span with a yellow wildflower in his buttonhole!—to smile down at Fawcett and ask how the patient was this morning! Gus had just put away the shaving outfit and only the quick look of warning from Fawcett had prevented Dureau being pitched out on his head. Queer? Well, it was beyond Gus, who could only stand there and stare. One minute ago Dean Fawcett had been sitting up, joking and laughing, and now here he was lying back on the cot, his face all screwed up with pain and looking as if he were so weak and feeble he wouldn't be able to get up for a month!

Then when the New Yorker had handed a folded paper to Gus and calmly told him it was a mes-

sage he wanted wired from Le Pas and Gus would therefore paddle over to the Landing with it right away—and here was some money to pay for it and here some more to get himself some tobacco. ! Jonsen had fairly roared his refusal and was on the point of kicking the proffered silver out of the fat white hand when Fawcett smiled at Dureau—*smiled!*—and told him not to mind Gus, who would certainly be glad to take the message across—and if Dureau would just leave the paper and the money on the box by the entrance of the tent. . . . Queer? Fawcett was *crazy!* It had been altogether too much for Jonsen and he had flung out of that tent before he smashed that crook where he stood! And the two of them smilin' at each other and Fawcett, beat up and helpless, left behind on that island by that pudding-faced—*Hell!*

But again, upon his return to the tent, there had been a strange look in those deep-set eyes of Dean Fawcett which silenced Gus; so that he went out and began to get ready for the day's trip to the Landing and back.

“You will take this message, Gus, and see that it is despatched word for word,” instructed Fawcett in low earnest tones. “Trust me to know what is for the best. Talk to no one about it and Gus—don't give it back to this man Dureau—even if he asks for it. You understand? He may change his mind. Get away at once.”

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"The old man said—," began Jonsen.

"I know, but it's all right, I tell you. I'll look after things till you get back and you'll be back by midnight. . . . Come here. Feel that muscle! Now, watch me!" With lower lip hanging in amazement Jonsen saw him spring from bed with a powerful leap that was eloquent of strength. "Now, go—quickly—and trust me." He smiled slowly. "Here is the note. Don't lose it, for it's important."

Gus took it, too astonished and perplexed to wonder that Fawcett had possession of it, but well satisfied that Sergeant Steve Hardy's strange friend was quite capable of looking after the camp in any emergency. Besides, there was the letter Missy wanted him to post. . . . Gus went straight to his canoe and five minutes later he was gone.

Back in the tent the old woodsman, propped on an elbow, listened intently, the lines of his face strained with anxiety; but at last he was satisfied that Jonsen was actually away. He lay back with a sigh, his eyes glinting, his wide mouth set in a grim smile. It remained that way until a step sounded a few minutes later and a shadow darkened the tent flap.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fawcett. May I come in?" She smiled brightly as she entered and placed the breakfast tray, with its dishes covered with snowy napkins, upon an upturned box. "How are you feeling now? You are a lot better?" She

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stood near him, looking down into his face and smiling; then, having moved the box over to his cot, she sat down to wait until he had finished, entertaining him with girlish chatter.

"My! but I'm glad to see your appetite so good. . . . Another cup of tea, Mr. Fawcett—Was there enough sugar in that last one? . . . I am afraid I am talking too much for a nurse!" she laughed. "I ought to be moving around on rubber soles, quiet and—and efficient. Why, that piece of toast in your hand—it is trembling, Mr. Fawcett!"

He stared at it, frowning.

"Why—so it is!" he admitted foolishly. "Smoking too much, I guess." He smiled at the quick concern in her fresh young face.

"Your poor head is hurting you still. I know it is! Gus told me you made him shave you this morning," she reproved. "I wish you wouldn't bother about that sort of thing until you are better. It's so—unnecessary."

He only smiled and shook his head without offering any explanation. She lifted the empty tray, but he reached out and touched her arm.

"Please, Miss Joyce—don't go for a moment. I want to talk to you." She smiled and sat down again. "It was good of you to fix me up so nicely last night and I thank you for your kindness to a stranger."

Not altogether a stranger; for I have heard so much about you and your good work among the

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Indians that it seems as if I had known you for a long time." His fingers played nervously with the blankets. "And I want to tell you how grand I think some of those things you've done—"

He shook his head in protest.

"I would sooner we talked about you, Miss Joyce, please. I am only an old fool 'sourdough' with no home but the North—"

"I, too, am of the North!"

She lifted to him a face flushed and eager, altogether charming.

"Yes," he said with interest. "I have been asking Gus about you. Your name—your real father's name was—Chetwood, I believe."

"Joyce Chetwood," she nodded. "Mr. Hardy is only my guardian; but I call him 'daddy.' . . . He's really that, almost; for I have been with him ever since I can remember."

"He has been good to you, eh?"

"Why, yes, of course!" She looked at him as if she considered such a question somewhat unusual.

"Of course, yes," echoed Fawcett hastily. "Forgive me for being so—so foolish."

His eyes turned away from her, but not before she had seen their quick softening, the far-away look that possessed them. Joyce gazed at the melancholy of his face not without wonder and marvelled at his tone. Could it be possible that

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this man, too, had known her guardian in the past and that ?

"Did you know him?"

The question came upon Fawcett suddenly and found him unprepared. He hesitated.

"Yes, long ago." Then, seeming to sense the questions she would ask, he added quickly: "But very slightly. We were speaking only for a few moments. You do not remember your father at all?"

She shook her head, and he saw that her brown eyes had welled with tears.

"I was only a tiny baby. He died in the Klondyke . . . my mother, too. I have never seen even a photograph of him or of my mother."

Fawcett reached out and took her hand, patting it.

"I—Forgive me for bringing up such a subject, Miss Joyce. Will you fix my head now please—if it needs it—the outside, I mean. It's solid wood inside apparently."

They smiled at each other. While she was at work he remarked casually upon the presence of the other two men at the camp.

"They want to buy the claim."

"Oh . . . and are you going to sell it?"

"Me? How did you know it belonged to me?"

"I did not know . . . that is—of course, Mr. Hardy—"

"But it is really my own. My father deeded it

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to me and that is why I don't want to sell it. It is the only thing I have that is my very own—that was my own father's. But I'm beginning to be afraid that—these men—they seem so sure of themselves—as if they had everything planned —” She stopped, warned by the sudden stiffening of his muscles.

“Planned? Do you mean that they are plotting to—force a sale? How? Tell me.”

“I should not have mentioned that, Mr. Fawcett. It's just a silly idea of mine and please forget what I said.”

He paid no attention to this.

“But what is your idea?” he persisted.

Joyce hesitated. She felt the need of advice such as this man could give her. And she knew he was a great friend of Sergeant Steve Hardy; Steve's face had fairly glowed as he told her about “old Dean”, as he called him. There was something about him that prompted her confidence—something quietly steadfast that would leave her no alternative but to tell him all she knew, even her most foolish speculations. Strange to say, she felt a queer sense of satisfaction stealing over her at the prospect. Dean Fawcett was worthy of her trust. Almost before she knew it, she was telling him—all that she had thought about Jean Dureau, his conversation with her, her guardian's apparent avoidance of him.

“It is very silly of me, Mr. Fawcett; but I

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shall be glad when daddy and—when he gets back here.”

Fawcett was silent for a moment. He seemed to be considering all this and her troubled sweetness seemed to affect him strangely. He took her hand again and patted it reassuringly. She noted with alarm that his face was more flushed and there was an expression in his eyes—of pain? She dropped to her knees by the cot and looked at him anxiously. Her solicitude seemed to give him an odd feeling in his throat so that he could not speak for the moment. Instead, he suddenly bent and reverently kissed the slender hand in his.

She did not withdraw it at once. Instinct told her that this strange, sad man yearned merely for her sympathy—that he was suffering mentally from some memory which the situation had resurrected. He voiced part of her thought.

“You will not misunderstand me, I know,” he pleaded huskily. “I am not trying to get fresh,” and he smiled at her with strange wistfulness. “I am old, old—a lonely old duffer—and somehow your great kindness to me, Miss Joyce, and the knowledge that you are troubled These men You will not worry, please, about them. Hardy will be back before long and in the meantime Gus and I will see that you and Miss Dorothy You are quite sure that you understand me, Miss Joyce? You will let me be your

good old friend whom you can trust absolutely—always!”

The face which looked up at her was eager, earnest. There was a hunger in the eyes of this lonely old woodsman that touched her. She felt strangely drawn towards him and obeying the impulse of the moment, she stooped suddenly and kissed him.

“My good friend always,” she murmured.

He closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he found himself alone in the tent. A strange man indeed, this Fawcett! His eyes were quite wet.

CHAPTER X

WHEN the cheap alarm clock on the kitchen shelf showed twenty minutes to eleven Joyce tossed aside her sewing and put things away for the night. The afternoon drizzle had settled down to a steady rain which looked as if it might be an all-night affair; there was no wind or electrical disturbance, just a steady down-pour. She had waited up for Gus, thinking that he would come in, soaked to the skin, and prepared to get him a hot meal; but it was evident that the guide had remained somewhere in shelter and would not reach the camp till morning.

Dorothy had been sound asleep for some time and Joyce herself stifled a yawn as she lifted the kettle to the back of the stove and checked the fire. She carried the lamp into the front room and set it on the table. As she did so a faint sound reached her ears above the noise of the rain on the roof and, turning quickly, she saw the door thrust open and a dripping figure on the threshold.

"Oh, you're back, Gus! You—" Her heart pounded ridiculously. "What do you want?" she demanded coldly.

Mr. Jean Dureau laughed pleasantly as he

calmly removed his glistening mackintosh and draped it over a chair.

"Gus is not back yet, Miss Chetwood. My friend Maugers is poor company when he is asleep. I called on Fawcett; but he, too, is in the Land of Nod. I saw your light and thought I'd drop in—"

"Do you know what time it is?"

"Sixteen minutes to eleven—sixteen and a half, to be exact," he said provokingly after deliberately consulting his gold watch.

"What do you want?" she demanded again.

"A little talk with you, Miss Chetwood,—in private. You remember me saying there were some things we would talk about later?"

"You choose a strange hour, sir!"

"Not at all," he said easily. "May I sit down? It is essential that we be alone—understand. Dorothy?" He jerked his head enquiringly towards the closed bedroom door.

"Miss Hardy is asleep," she said, correcting his familiarity with sharp resentment.

"Good! Then we can talk freely." He smoothed his moustache and eyed her speculatively.

"I must ask you to defer anything you may wish to say until to-morrow, Mr. Dureau. I can not—"

"Oh, but you can, Miss Chetwood. Come now, be nice and sit down, won't you? It will not take

long and I give you my assurance it is of vital importance — to you — and particularly to Mr. Martin Hardy — *Very* particularly to him. Allow me” He placed a chair for her and smiled insistently.

With sudden courage she crossed the room and sat down opposite him. There was little use in putting off the interview and she was curious to know what lay back of his words. With an outer calm which belied the throbbing pulse in her throat she waited for him to speak.

“That’s fine. Thank you. Now, let’s get right to business. You are doubtless aware of how I came to hear about this claim of yours—through Maugers. I have come all the way from New York to see it and I won’t quibble. I like it. I want to buy it.”

“But I don’t want to sell it.” Her hand went up in an impetuous gesture which he ignored.

“I thought at first Hardy owned it; but I find you are really the registered owner and there is nothing to prevent us doing business—”

“Except my refusal to sell it, Mr. Dureau.”

His eyebrows lifted quizzically.

“I will make you a fair offer—”

“A lease only was intended. I will not sell outright,” she repeated determinedly.

“That is only because you do not understand the position, Miss Chetwood. That is what I wish to explain. You are privileged to change

your mind, are you not? You will decide to sell it when I explain—”

“You are wasting time, Mr. Dureau. Even if I wanted to sell, I could not do so—without my guardian’s consent. I am not yet of age. You will have to speak to Mr. Hardy about it—to deal with him.”

But he was not to be put off in this manner.

“You can influence your guardian to agree. Your wishes in the matter would naturally prevail upon him—”

“Yes—not to sell the claim.”

He frowned at her persistence.

“One of the things to be learned in life, Miss Chetwood—if you will allow me—is that we cannot always have what we want—”

“Your education in that direction then, Mr. Dureau—if you will allow me—appears to have been neglected,” she retorted mockingly. “You want this property and you can not have it. Is that clear? Or must I keep on till doomsday, telling you it is not for sale?”

He leaned back in his chair and regarded her flushed cheeks in silence for a moment, tolerant amusement on his fat face. The sound of the rain obtruded.

“I want this claim. I want it badly,” he resumed. “And when I make up my mind to a thing, I’ve got to have it. It’s in my blood.”

“It belonged to my father. It’s all I’ve got

that was his—my only birthright—and I will not sell it for any sum of money you can name. And when I make up my mind like that, I can not change it. That's in *my* blood!"

Joyce swallowed her rising apprehensions and tried not to look at him; but all the while she was conscious of his quiet amusement, his air of patience, his assurance. She felt as if she were being treated like a child who presently would see the error of its way and her resentment burned.

"I am trying not to be rough with you, Miss Chetwood," and she was quick to sense the new note of severity in his tone. "I do not want to tell you things you might not wish to hear, but" He paused deliberately.

"What do you mean by that?" How palpably the words lacked the *sang-froid* she wished to instill in them!

"I mean that you compel me to speak plainly. I do not wish to force a sale. I had hoped you might be prepared to put through the deal legitimately—on a friendly basis."

"Force a sale? *Force* a sale?" she repeated. Her throat was dry. What was coming now?

"Exactly that, Miss Chetwood. I happen to be in a position to do so. Will you accept the statement and reconsider your decision or shall I go on and tell you a little story—a terrible little story, my dear young lady, which will destroy forever much that now brings you happiness? It is best

sometimes, is it not, to remain happily ignorant? I think so. I advise it—for your own good. Let me make you a reasonable offer for the claim and we will forget the other possibility.”

He waited for her to speak, but for a moment or two she could not. Her face flushed in anger at his boldness; then the color receded in fear of the unknown thing which lay behind his threat. What did this man know?—what could he know which gave him the power to wrest her inheritance from her unwilling hands? She must find out. If it was a real danger, it were well to be apprized of it. If it was only a ruse

“You can hardly expect that kind of talk—I can only consider it an impertinence, Mr. Dureau!” She looked at him defiantly. “I have no doubt that you are quite capable of taking any advantage you can to take away my property; but if this—story you speak of has anything to do with Mr. Martin Hardy—”

“It has everything to do with him.”

“I do not wish to hear it. I will not have anything said against him.” Her eyes were shining.

“Very commendable,” grunted Dureau. “It is to avoid that very thing—having people say things about him—You think a lot of him, do you not? His standing as a respectable citizen, his home, everything he values in life—do you want these shattered? One whisper from me and he is

—smashed! You have it in your power to prevent it. It is up to you, Miss Chetwood.”

His eyes had hardened. The gleam in them struck a chill to the girl’s heart; yet she faced him doggedly.

“Mr. Hardy is a man of established integrity and nothing you could say could blacken his good name in the least. People would not believe it. Your insinuations are beneath contempt!”


“I insinuate nothing!” he said sharply. “You can believe what you like! Facts are facts, Miss Chetwood. Let me ask you something—is it not true that Hardy knew I was on my way here before he started out on this trip of his to Winnipeg? Was he not greatly upset about something?—left hurriedly, didn’t he?”

She could not deny it. It was the thought which had obsessed her so. Martin Hardy had been afraid to meet Dureau! He was—running away! From what?

“Tell me how he became your guardian. What do you know of your own history? What have you been told?”

“Why should I answer such questions?” Joyce flashed at him.

“Suit yourself,” he shrugged. “As I said before, it is best for you to choose ignorance and thereby happiness—by selling out to me this particular bit of property which I must have. Do I get the claim on that basis?”



“No.”

“Then, answer my questions!”

“Mr. Hardy became my guardian when I was a baby in arms.”

“And your parents?”

“It happened in the Klondyke, during the gold rush. My father had gone there to make his fortune. He and my mother were taken sick and were dying when Mr. Hardy called on his way out of Dawson. My father asked him to take charge of me and he did so and tried to get help—”

“Went straight back to Dawson, I suppose?” interrupted Dureau. There was a smirk of cynical amusement on his face.

“No. He sent a halfbreed. He was on urgent business that required long hours of travel—Why do you laugh like that?” She gazed at him with white face, noting the mockery in his eyes.

“Because, my dear girl, the story you have been told is about what I expected.”

“You mean it is—not true?” she gasped.

“Part of it, part of it; but badly twisted to cover up your wonderful guardian’s tracks. Urgent business, requiring long hours of travel—*Mon dieu*, yes!” His mirth got the better of him again. “Listen and I will tell you what actually happened. Hardy called at the cabin—yes—when your father was away in Dawson. Your mother was there—dying condition—too weak to move. When your father got back he found her

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dead and the baby gone—a whim of Hardy's, I guess. The point is, your mother was found locked in her bedroom! The key was on the outside."

The color which had ebbed from the girl's face rushed again to her cheeks. She half rose from her chair.

"That's a lie!" she cried hoarsely. "How—how dare you, sir, tell me this!"

"Because it is true!" asserted Dureau promptly and in the charged silence which followed the rain beat down insistently on the roof. "I warned you that it was not a pretty tale. But there is more of it. This urgent business of Hardy's that required long hours of travel—what do you suppose it was?"

He forced her to meet his gaze and in that moment she felt faint. She could only stare back at him, speechlessly. His mouth had grown cruel; his eyes glowed. He was speaking again:

"Hardy left Dawson in the first place for good and sufficient reasons. Had he gone back there the crowd would have lynched him. He was fleeing for his life out of Dawson—with the police looking for him. He was wanted for—murder! He had just killed a man—his own brother—!"

Joyce stood up. Her face was set like marble. She went across to the door and turned with one hand on the latch.

"You will go now, please. I have listened too long to your lies. If you do not leave at once—"

Silently he reached for his hat and shook himself into his wet mackintosh before he spoke.

"I did not want to tell you these buried secrets, Miss Chetwood; but you forced me to. Whether you believe them or not does not alter the situation in the least. I want this claim and I am going to have it. I will give you two days to think it over and alter your decision; if that is not done I shall go to the authorities. The case against Hardy fell flat for lack of evidence at the time; but it will not do so a second time, I assure you. Think it over carefully—*Mon dieu!* but it's raining! Well, good-night, Miss Chetwood."

She got the door shut somehow—and bolted—then sank down weakly on the floor and leaned back against the wall with closed eyes. She heard Dorothy stirring presently and scrambled to her feet.

"What is it, Joyce?" Dorothy, looking very white and timid and frail in her nightdress, was blinking in the doorway of the room they occupied together. "Why are you not in bed? What time is it? Is anything wrong? Isn't Gus back?"

Joyce breathed a sigh of thankfulness. Dorothy had not heard.

"No, dear; but it's all right. It is raining so hard the canoe would have been swamped and Gus probably put in somewhere for shelter till it

stops. I'm coming now. You'll catch cold if you stand there. Back under the covers like a good girl!"

* * * *

The morning sun sparkled cheerfully upon a world of waterdrops. The little clearing glittered like a million diamonds when Joyce Chetwood opened the cabin door and looked across to where Gus Jonsen—who had returned during the night—was coaxing a reluctant fire. In her face was no brightness to match the morning; it was wan and tired. Yet as she gazed around upon the familiar scene—the lake, gently ruffling under little puffs of wind—it was hard to believe that in these peaceful surroundings Tragedy could linger to cast a shadow—could enter her life.

"How did you sleep, missie?" shouted Gus. He strode over to her, the color creeping into his bronzed face. "You aint lookin' so well this morning. Guess the rain must have kep' you awake, eh? Hell, but she sure did come down! I got soaked good an' plenty," he grinned.

Her forced smile vanished in a look of concern. She had been wondering how the men had spent the night in the flimsy shelter afforded by the tents. Now she insisted upon making an inspection in spite of the guide's assurance that everything inside was as dry as powder and that he had got his wetting in the open before reaching camp. She enquired anxiously after Fawcett.

"Oh, he's all right, you bet you! Go on in, missie," with which Gus picked up soap and towel and went off to the lake.

The girl had been speaking but a few moments to her patient when she discovered that his shirt was quite damp. Her look was eloquent of self-reproach.

"I should have known! Forgive me! You are wet through! The rain must have come in something dreadful: Why didn't you call me, Mr. Fawcett? Look!—feel that!—saturated! And your coat here on the box—! Dear me, this will never do!"

Fawcett made no attempt to verify her statement. Undoubtedly the garments were wet—a self-evident fact.

"I am going to fix up daddy's bed for you. You must shift into the cabin until you get better. Otherwise, you're liable to catch your death of cold!"

"Please don't worry over a tough old stick like me, Miss Joyce." Yet it was apparent that he enjoyed the mothering. "Bless your heart, child! Haven't I been sleeping out in the rain for more years than you have lived?"

Nevertheless she could see that her suggestion was not unwelcome and he readily accepted the invitation when she insisted. Outside she explained to Jonsen that Fawcett was to be moved into the cabin.

“He is just wet through to the skin!—simply wet through!” she declared seriously.

Gus looked at her in frank amazement. He pushed his fingers under his hat and scratched his head.

“Yep, missie—just as you say. I’ll move him in. It rained all right—sure did!”

But as he walked off his forehead was wrinkled in thought and he mumbled to himself. The tent had shed water like a duck all night! The trench he had dug around it had taken care of that water! Fawcett wet through to his skin? Then there was a reason for it—and old Dean didn’t want the girl to know. . . . First chance, he’d ask him about it. Meanwhile—

Gus grinned at a bright idea. He went over and without saying anything of his intention to Fawcett, he gathered up his own blankets and peeked out to make sure he was unobserved. He carried them down to the lake and surreptitiously dipped them in the water and wrung them out. Later when Joyce was standing in the doorway, watching him, he ostentatiously took them out of the tent and spread them out to dry in the sun.

It amused him. He began to imagine he was taking part in strange happenings going on outside his ken.

CHAPTER XI

SERGEANT STEVE HARDY found great difficulty in keeping his mind upon the business he had in hand as he paddled mechanically northward. His browned face wore a worried look and his thoughts kept reverting constantly to the beautiful girl who had come into his life so unexpectedly and who already had come to mean everything to him. He had belittled her apprehensions; but now as he went carefully over all that he had seen and learned during the past week he was far from satisfied. He was obsessed by the feeling that all was not as it should be at the Hardy camp—that beneath the surface was an undercurrent of intrigue. He could not segregate definite evidence of it; but his instincts seldom failed him and in spite of himself he could not shake off the fit of depression that was upon him.

The claim was rich. Gus had shown him. It was a find—a big one. It was doubtful if the old man or the girl were aware of its full value. This man from New York—he must know it. He had come a long way to inspect it, to buy it. And Mangers! He knew that breed!

He began to wonder if he had done right in

leaving her—duty or no duty! It was as much his duty—! But pshaw! this was utterly foolish—borrowing trouble when already there was enough of it ahead of him on this trip! Besides, there was Gus and Fawcett—old Dean was a long way from dead yet. . . . Damn this Red Lewis!—he had to be got—right away—brought to justice. After that—he would see her again! He dared scarcely credit his eager thoughts. What right had he to presume that she cared for him—that way?

By noon he had reached the vast group of islands that filled the northern end of the lake. He landed on one and ate a hasty lunch. Then on again.

As he worked his way among the ash-gray masses of rocky islands the utter solitude of the wilderness seemed to swallow him. It was appalling. Yet he was used to it and it was seldom that it oppressed him as it did now. It was almost as if he—a pigmy floating in a dried pod—were heading into the maw of Fate where Elemental Things beyond mortal control lurked in wait to seize him and carry him before a monster with red hair—! Angrily he shook off the mood. He would need to keep his wits about him! It was a real danger he was facing and it not only had red hair but a Winchester repeater! He did not believe in premonitions. Yet he had a strange sense of impending trouble.

Overhead the sky was clear. It seemed to be near him. Elusive winds in the trees made them rustle occasionally.

For hours he paddled in and out among the islands, keen eyes searching the shore lines. He began to feel the nervous strain that accompanied the search in the knowledge that Red was around and at any given moment even might be watching him from some hidden vantage point—drawing a bead on him, it might be! The uncertainty of his task began to throw a spell upon him like a shroud.

The sky lost its morning clarity and gradually became gray. Late in the afternoon an intermittent drizzle began, but while it brought discomfort it was not enough to interrupt the search. It would likely drive the outlaw into camp, however, and even might lead him to risk a fire. Steve began to watch for smoke in addition to other signs and sounds of life.

But it was none of these that rewarded his alertness. It was the end of a half submerged canoe that caught his roving eye. He stopped paddling, his pulses galloping. Very slowly he approached it, drew alongside. Yes, it was his own canoe all right—the one that Lewis had stolen. Mutely it told its own story; for it could mean only one thing—an accident. Its late occupant had tipped out somehow—Steve thought suddenly of the liquor and guessed the rest. Red

had been very drunk, had unbalanced the uncertain craft and probably was drowned.

If this guess were correct, the body would drift down the narrow channel to the left. He stopped paddling and allowed his canoe to swing around and follow the current. It took him down the channel he had just traversed, then for just an instant the canoe hesitated before it swung off into a narrower channel, barely twelve yards wide—one that yet remained unexplored. Soon he found it necessary to use his paddle to keep the canoe from striking submerged boulders.

Then he saw it—the thing he was looking for. Guiding his canoe alongside the object the young officer gazed in repulsion. Red Lewis, gangster, gunman, had fired his last shot—pitched his last camp in the North. Head first, he had drifted until his shoulder had come in contact with a submerged rock; the ghastly face with its starey eyes was just awash.

With a shudder which he could not repress, Sergeant Hardy stretched out his hand and gripping the coat-collar, manoeuvred with his paddle. The body slid off the rock and sank with bubbles in its wake as the canoe worked its way towards shallow water. There the "mountie" dragged his grewsome find onto high land.

The drizzle had turned to rain and he felt strangely cold—and alone. He must have a fire. He must hunt a suitable spot to build it; for ex-

perience told him the rain was just beginning and would likely be prolonged for hours. He set about this at once and found relief in action. There was a stretch of stony beach that he had passed just a little while before—with a cliff of rock overhanging it—just the thing! It would be dry there—protection for the night, no matter how hard it rained or blew—and there was all sorts of driftwood piled along—Great!

He moved the body of Red Lewis over behind some boulders. He decided to bury it later—after the rain stopped. But he searched the pockets now. The man was wearing an old hunting-jacket and from an inside pocket Steve withdrew a large leather wallet; there was also a little memorandum book, a watch with initials roughly scratched inside the case, a pocket knife—enough to establish the criminal's identity to the satisfaction of Inspector O'Malley. He carried the articles across to the canoe and put out for the shelter he had selected.

Here, away from the dead man, with a huge fire of driftwood roaring brightly and casting a circle of heat, Steve felt more cheerful. He experienced a glow of satisfaction that he had found such an ideal shelter from the rainstorm. There was enough bleached wood lying at the cliff edge—derelict tree-trunks and what not—to keep a fire going all night if he wished. He began to

whistle as he unpacked his kit and made preparations for a meal.

By the time he had eaten and washed up his pans it was quite dark. The fire threw a ruddy flare of light along the stoney beach, against the black arch of the cliff rock, out upon the water beyond. Through the firelight the rain came down in silver threads upon the surface of the water which danced and hissed beneath the pelting drops. He filled and lighted his pipe and sat down, contented.

Then he reached for the things he had been lucky enough to secure from the person of the man he had been hunting. In the memorandum book the outlaw had evidently tried his hand at keeping a diary; it told in scattered language the history of his doings and alone provided sufficient identification. Steve gave brief examination of the miscellaneous articles and last of all, took up the leather wallet, emptying its contents on a flat stone and grunting satisfaction that they were hardly damp from their waterproof interior.

It was apparent at once that the wallet had not belonged to Red Lewis. There were several letters, bearing the same address—old letters, post-marked Dawson City, the date undecipherable, addressed to a Lawrence Hardy. Steve guessed immediately that the wallet was the property of Martin Hardy; probably the hunting-jacket was also his. Funny, he thought, that Hardy had not

mentioned its loss at the time they had talked about the outlaw's visit to the camp and his theft of rifle and canoe. Perhaps the jacket had not been missed at first.

About to replace the letters, he caught a glimpse of a photograph inside one of them and, curiosity getting the better of him, he pulled it out—and dropped wallet, letters, everything but the old photograph at which he stared in breathless astonishment. With a strange thrill he bent nearer to the fire the better to examine the likeness. It was the photo of a man about twenty-five years of age and written across the bottom of the card in a fine flowing hand were the words: “Good luck, old man!—Your affectionate brother—Lawrence.”

But there was nothing in all this to so startle Steve that he exclaimed aloud; it was the fact that he was gazing upon a likeness of himself! That was his first agitated thought. The clothes were different, of course—and the hair—that was arranged a little differently; but the features—and the name—so like!

For long moments he knelt, staring in the firelight at that highbred boyish face, trying vainly to recall elusive thoughts—things he had heard his mother say. She had always said he was very like his father. . . . Could it be possible that this was a photograph of his father? His own father! Hungrily he eyed it. But what was

this man Martin Hardy doing with it? . . . what—? . . . brothers! Martin Hardy was this man's brother! Yes, and his own name was Stephen *Lawrence* Hardy! Martin Hardy, therefore, was his uncle!

He leaped to his feet, heart beating rapidly with the hypothesis. It must be true. Everything fitted. When they had met first—over at the Landing the other day—Martin Hardy had shown instant recognition . . . not of him, because they had never met before. No. But of the likeness—that was what he recognized. He was startled like that because in Steve he saw his brother Lawrence, standing there. No, not just startled; it had been something more than that. Fear? That was nonsense! What was there to be afraid of?

Soberly the young man sat down. He reached for a burning stick and relighted his pipe. He had been convinced from the first that all which had passed had contained a certain significance—had presented some enigma. But no wild notion had been his that the similarity in surname was other than a coincidence or that he himself moved in the enigma. There was no family resemblance in the features of Martin Hardy; he and his younger brother apparently had looked very unlike each other.

Slowly Steve replaced the photograph and proceeded deliberately to open and read every letter. But there was nothing in their contents to answer

the questions which crowded upon the eager young reader so insistently—merely the news from home—in Montreal—written in chatty fashion and invariably signed by “your loving sister, Ada.” Motherly instructions to her favorite brother regarding his flannels and not getting his feet wet! In Dawson? Steve grinned as he read. Then his face sobered in thought, in fancy of that home from which the two brothers had set out in search of fortune in the gold fields of the North so long ago. . . .

His Aunt Ada! He could almost see her in the fire flame at his feet. His mother had mentioned her once or twice when he had enquired too insistently about his father’s people—an aunt who had died. She had allowed him to believe that his father had no other relatives. She had never so much as mentioned the existence of Martin Hardy, his father’s eldest brother! Very strange! Why had his mother been so reticent. That there was a great sadness in his mother’s life he had sensed more than once of late years; but he had put it down to his father’s tragic death—killed in a snow-slide, he had always understood—a few days after their wedding. It was enough to sadden his mother so, in very truth. Poor little mother! But Martin Hardy? He was there in Dawson; the letters said so. . . . He must have known of his brother’s wedding; yet he had never visited his

sister-in-law. . . . Mrs. Lawrence Hardy never spoke his name Strange? The whole thing was very strange! When her son got home from this trip he would have many direct questions to ask her—much to talk about.

His father! His own father! A great lump lodged in his throat as he sat there for a long time, gazing upon that old photograph—the only one he had ever seen—probably the only one in existence—rescued by merest chance from the submerged body of an outlaw in a channel of water in the Northern wilderness! . . . Remarkable! . . . And by his own son in this manner! . . . It was more than chance! It was Fate perhaps! Well, the big thing was he had it—actually had it!—nothing on earth could make him part with a thing so precious. His very own father . . . and Aunt Ada . . . his own people!

For hours the rain came down—poured down—beat down steadily. Under the shelter of the overhanging cliff the fire flamed on; died down to palpitating coals. Beside it, rolled in his blankets, the young sergeant of the Royal Mounted slept, his hands hugged to his tunic, inside of which the ancient wallet was buttoned, secure.

CHAPTER XII

THE sun was well overhead when Steve awoke next morning. The sky was bright and blue without a single cloud. The air was fresh and sweet with resinous odors of balsam and spruce; the young man stretched his thews luxuriously, knotted his muscles, leaped to his feet with a laugh. Every vestige of fatigue was gone from his body, anxiety from his mind. He had rested well and his search had come to an end sooner than expected. Even taking his time, he could make the Hardy camp by nightfall and he would see Joyce again. There would be a moon A wonderful thing—moonlight!

He laughed at himself and cut a caper. He whistled happily as he started the fire, for the time being forgetful of the grewsome duty which still remained to be performed—the burial of Red Lewis. He spent an hour after breakfast, fishing for a mess of trout; a patch of blueberries attracted his attention and he gathered a tin of these; it was long past high noon when at last, having eaten again, he rolled his tarpaulins, carefully put out the campfire and proceeded to the spot which he had chosen for erection of a cairn of rocks over the body of the outlaw.

The task took him longer than he had expected; for he spent some time, chisseling a suitable inscription upon a slab of stone on top of the cairn and trimming a "lobstick" nearby to mark the spot—a tall fir that stood well out from its fellows on the highest point of the island. It was mid afternoon when at last he surveyed his completed work and with a breath of satisfaction turned his canoe southward.

Half an hour later he broke out of the intricate network of narrow channels and commenced to paddle in earnest. By sundown he had made such good progress that he was able to ease up a little, confident that another two hours would find him at the camp which had become such a centre of attraction for him during the past little while.

A big yellow moon swung up over the eastern tree-tops as he dreamed along and about two hundred yards to his left loomed the last of the islands of any consequence. Limned against the light of the rising moon, it rose from the water like a huge black blot. As he came abreast of the island his eye caught a fleeting glimpse of red fire, which vanished as the canoe slid onward past a shoulder of rock.

Steve stopped paddling, his forehead wrinkled in perplexity. A camp-fire—probably Indians. Then his speculation was nipped off and every nerve grew taut as across the silent air came a single note—a woman's scream! Struck motion-

less, he waited and in the instant the scream came again—then continuously.

A woman! In that out-of-the-way spot! The canoe spun under the sweep of his paddle and drove for the island. As he drew near his straining ears were startled by another sound—the sharp crack of a small-calibre automatic.

Steve ran the canoe onto a flat shelf of rock and scrambled ashore. By force of habit he pulled the light craft out of the water. Then he ran, stumbling over rocks and moss in the dark shadow, towards the cleft in the rock and the sound of voices. They were raised, the woman's in fear and the man's in anger, and carried clear in the abnormal quiet of the night. . . . He recognized them both!

A thick network of willows barred his path and he struggled through impatiently, scratching hands and face, ripping his way. In his sudden frenzy he imagined the woman's voice vainly fighting for expression through the muffling grasp of masculine fingers. Ah, spoken words intelligible now.

"Mr. Mangers! Please! Oh, why are you doing this? It is madness! Are you out of your mind?"

"You fire that pop-gun again, young woman, and I'll. . . .!"

"Stand back! The next time I will not fire in the air! I—Oh!"

Yes, it was Joyce's voice, filled now with the

pathos of a frightened child. There was sound of a struggle.

With a dry feeling in his throat Steve pressed forward and parting the willows, came suddenly upon the scene. Before him the island opened out into a wide ravine with a grassy clearing in the foreground, flooded with moonlight. The place was encircled with trees and rocks, sombre except where the cold rays of the moon struck them into weird relief.

But Sergeant Steve Hardy had no conscious eye for the setting. To one side, stricken dumb with terror, half reclining on the ground where she had been flung, was the cowering figure of Dorothy Hardy, hair hanging wild, her dress torn. In the centre the powerful bulk of Maugers, the mining-engineer, towered over Joyce Chetwood; he had evidently sprung at her and seized her wrist before she could use the tiny weapon which she held in her hand. He had forced her hand high above her head and was in the act of wresting the little automatic pistol out of her fingers; he tossed it aside into the grass with a laugh of triumph.

There was no mistaking the situation. The man's face was ugly with the passion which possessed him. There was no time to speculate on how the thing had come about—what the two girls were doing so far from the camp in such a lonely place at such a late hour and in such com-

pany. The fact remained that they were there and that this beast was attacking them.

From babyhood Steve had had one besetting fault above all others—lack of self-control. His temper was a thing with which his mother had contended all through childhood and which he likewise had had to struggle with in manhood years. Of late he had congratulated himself that he was mastering it; but in the face of the present crisis it rose and choked him, overwhelmed him. He saw red!

As he plunged forward, his hands worked convulsively and low guttural noises issued from his throat. He was upon Mangers almost before the man realized the meaning of the girl's loud cry. Mangers loosened his hold and tried to turn but one of the "mountie's" arms whipped around his neck and the "mountie's knee sunk into the small of his back. He yelled with pain, surprise, rage and the next instant was pitched forward upon his face by a powerful thrust that well nigh crippled him.

Joyce, released, shrank with a cry of alarm. She recognized Steve at once; for the moonlight lit the scene like day. But her eyes widened in horror at the look on the young man's face; it was twisted in its ferocity, bestial with the intent of the killer aroused, foam-flecked at the lips, insane. In fear she shrank from the sight, calling

him by name. She had never seen that look on a human face and it shocked and frightened her.

Steve paid no attention to her, did not hear her, did not see her, so intent was he in watching the movements of his enemy on the ground. Mechanically he unbuckled his belt and tossed it away with its holster from which protruded the butt of his big service automatic; it swung from his neck on the pistol cord and impatiently he ducked his head out of the loop, knocking off his hat, and casting the belt away a second time. He needed no firearms for this job; he wanted to break this hulk with bare hands—to tear him—to pieces. Body bent in panther crouch, he waited for the man to rise.

He had not long to wait. Mangers' face was white with passion and as the first surprise of the attack wore away, his little eyes blazed with fury. He came up slowly, carefully, feeling for secure foothold—then launched his huge bulk upon this mounted policeman whom he hated. Steve's foot slipped as he tried to sidestep and Mangers had him in a mighty grip, arms pinioned, powerless. He proceeded deliberately to crush the breath from his rival's body.

With the danger of the position Steve began to think more clearly. Back and forth they lurched as he strove with all his strength to break the deadly hold. A sudden shift by Mangers and with a growl of ferocious joy the mining engin-

eer's great hands came up to the other's throat and sank into it.

In desperation Steve swung with his right for the man's ear. The blow landed just behind the ear and for an instant there was a relaxing of the sickening grip upon his windpipe. He swung again with all his might, then gripping the wrists he forced his thumbs into them, farther . . farther!

Joyce watched in frightened fascination, hands clasped to her breasts, eyes wide. What would the end be? Suddenly above the scuffle of the fight and the mutterings of the men she thought she heard a distant hallo from the water. Gus would be out searching for them, now that it was dark and they had not returned. She knew that; she had prayed that he would find them—in time. Hardly knowing what she did in her excitement, she scrambled about in the grass, found the discarded belt and drew the heavy weapon from its holster. She raised it in the air, shut her eyes and pulled the trigger. The roar deafened her!

Beyond a quick toss of his head, Steve paid no attention even to this. The men were on the ground now, fighting and snarling like a pair of beasts. Now Mangers had the uniformed man by the throat; the next instant Steve would be kneeling over him, pounding his face. The change of position in the wrestle and of advantage in the fight was unceasing. Each knew that it was to the finish!

Both were weakening. Their breath was whistling through their teeth in painful gasps; their faces were covered with sweat and blood. Steve had soon satisfied himself that the mining engineer was unarmed except for a clasp-knife and at the first attempt to get this open, he had kicked it spinning.

They got to their feet again, panting, eyeing each other as they circled about for fresh openings. Again Maugers sprang in; but this time Steve's foot did not slip and he caught the assailant momentarily off his guard and sent a smashing right to the point of the chin.

The man wobbled—sank to his knees—was up again, mouthing inarticulate curses through swollen lips.

On they fought. The girl ran towards them, calling their names, imploring them to stop. Neither paid any attention to her. Steve saw his chance, stepped in quickly smash, smash, smash! Maugers went down stayed down.

Steve rocked on his feet—turned his bloody face towards her—smiled wearily.

"Get up, you!" he rasped out to the inert heap at his feet. He poked at him with a boot. But Maugers made no move, only stared up, his one good eye burning with silent venom. "Had—'nough, eh?"

Getting no reply, he turned and stumbled down to the lakeside. For about three minutes he wal-

lowed around, bathing his face and trying to pull himself together. The cold water on the open wounds made him gasp with pain, but gradually it numbed the aching nerves and soothed his spirit.

When he returned, Mangers was still lying sprawled on the ground in the identical spot and the two girls were off to one side, sobbing in each other's arms. The fast moving events had at last broken down the calm courage that was Joyce's nature and Steve felt strangely helpless to comfort her. Her whole body was trembling in nervous reaction as she clung to Dorothy who was in a state of utter collapse.

"Joyce—how—how is it you are here—so far from camp—with this—?" He jerked a thumb disdainfully in the direction of the defeated Mangers.

He spoke gently—not in any tone of reproach or fault-finding and he was astonished to find the girl's eyes turned on him in fear. She actually shrank from him.

"Go away—please! Leave us—alone!" she cried hysterically.

He backed off, wondering, helpless to reassure her. Then he turned at a shout behind him and saw Gus and Fawcett leaping towards them. They stopped in their tracks for a moment, taking in the scene. Then with a bellow of rage Jon-

sen jumped towards Mangers who was sitting up but still unable to get on his feet.

"Gus!" screamed Joyce. "Don't you dare touch him! He's nearly dead!" She ran forward frantically and beat him back with her small fists drumming madly on his great flannel chest.

"All right, missie," grinned Gus. He had had one close look and even he was satisfied. He turned to Steve and pumped an arm. "Good work, young feller!" was his rumbled approval.

Steve did not respond. He seemed only half conscious of his surroundings, lost in thought. He stared at the girl as if she was a puzzle which he was trying to solve. He stared at Fawcett who had just come to him and gripped him silently by the hand, his eyes burning through him interrogatively.

"I got here—just in time," Steve had said simply.

"Thank God!" was Fawcett's fervent whisper—so fervent, in fact that Steve could only stare at him.

It was apparent to all that the girls were in an overwrought condition by what they had been through. It was well that they be taken back to camp as quickly as possible. Steve stepped forward, holding out his hand to Joyce, smiling confidently.

"We are going now. Will you come in my canoe?"

"No, no!" she breathed. Again she shrank from him! Again that strange look in her eyes! She looked up and saw Fawcett coming forward. With a little cry of relief she ran towards him, clinging to his arm. "Take me away from here. Please—in your canoe—Dorothy and I." She was sobbing again.

Fawcett straightened stiffly. He glanced around swiftly at the others; then his eye met Steve's steadily. Without a word he turned, held out his hand towards Dorothy and piloted the two girls towards the water.

Steve stared after them, surprised and hurt. What was the matter? What had he done that she should act like that? Was this a challenge? Fawcett! His old friend, Fawcett—and Joyce! He gazed foolishly out to where the lake stretched its silvered expanse. A wonderful thing—moonlight!

He gave a short laugh as he turned to join Gus.

CHAPTER XIII

THE invitation to take up residence inside the cabin until Martin Hardy returned fitted in with the plans which had begun to formulate in the secretive mind of Fawcett, the forest hermit. The role of protector which he longed to assume was furthered by this arrangement and it was a very cheerful patient whom Gus had moved in "out of the wet." Gus had been inclined to make a joke of it, but received no encouragement nor any satisfaction of his natural curiosity as to why the "patient" should continue his pretence of helplessness.

The failure of the girls to return from their afternoon's fishing trip, however, had quickly altered Fawcett's plans in this regard at least. It was quite late when Jonsen came to him with a troubled face and reported the absence of Maugers as well. The two men had looked at each other soberly, silently exchanging the same apprehension. Therewith Gus had strode away to get the canoe into the water, Fawcett had followed and the grim search began.

As they paddled northward to the fishing grounds which Gus had picked out for the girls, his silent companion's thoughts were busy. It

was clear to him now that he must alter his original plans somewhat; the safety of the two girls must come first, as a matter of course, and since his arrival at the camp it had been growing upon him that it was not a safe place for the girls to remain, even under the eye of such a stalwart as the Swede guide. Hardy had no business to leave his girls alone in this wilderness; it was no place for helpless young women to be left at the mercy of men as unscrupulous. . . . Yes, they must be removed. No doubt about that. But where? How? Would they agree to go?—with him, a stranger. . . .?

The problem of how best to convince Joyce Chetwood that his plan for their removal from the camp was the proper course had been with him during the anxious hour which followed. It was with him now as he pointed the nose of the canoe for the open moonlit lake and regarded the silent figures of his two exhausted passengers. Dorothy lay in the bow, her head resting in the older girl's lap. Wherever Joyce would go, Dorothy would go; it was Joyce, therefore, who must decide.

But for a time Fawcett said nothing of what was in his mind. The shock of the experience through which they had just passed had left both girls emotionally spent. He knew that the event favored the proposal he would presently make; but he felt no elation because of that—only

sympathy for them in their nervous state. The knowledge that it was all over and that they were safely homeward bound, the magic of the moon on the lake, the rhythm of the paddle strokes and the soft whisper of the parted water gradually soothed them into a more normal frame of mind.

After a little he talked quietly with Joyce. Bit by bit he learned the facts of the encounter with Mangers. They had gone away by themselves from the camp, taking a lunch-basket and intending to make a little picnic of the excursion. Apparently the mining-engineer had seen them depart and had followed them; he was idle at the time, Gus and Dureau having gone off to trace a distant vein which Dureau had uncovered. At any rate he had unexpectedly put in an appearance shortly after the girls had started fishing and had pleaded so forlornly to be allowed to join them that they had consented. He had made himself very agreeable and they had enjoyed his company; it was only after the lunch-basket had been emptied and the sun went down that he became too familiar. He had hidden the canoes and they had suddenly discovered that he had conceived the mad idea of spending the night on the island. One thing had led to another. Dorothy had tried to interfere. . . .! He had lost his head completely at that and flung her brutally out of his way. . . .! He had talked wildly of his love for Joyce—had pleaded with her to marry him,

promising to prevent Dureau buying the claim.
..... Madness!

"Oh, Mr. Fawcett, I want to forget! Please, we won't talk any more about it. I don't want to see that man again. I—I want to go away. I—want—" She bowed her head in misery.

"And why not?" came Fawcett's cool, calm voice from which all eagerness was carefully suppressed. "Why must you remain here—at the camp—when you no longer wish to stay there? Pardon me, Miss Joyce, but it is the very thing I was going to take the liberty of suggesting. Frankly, I think it would be best for you and Miss Dorothy to leave at once—to-night."

Both girls looked at him in some surprise.

"To-night?" echoed Joyce. She turned her face, wan in the moonlight, full upon him. "Where to?"

"Your guardian will be returning soon. Why not go to meet him? We could make The Pas in a little over two days."

"We?"

"You could not travel alone—by canoe," he smiled, "not even if you knew the route. But if you wish it, I will take you. I am serious, Miss Joyce. I believe it is for the best. Will you trust me? Will you go with me?—to-night?"

Trust him? It was not a question of trusting him, she realized. Was he not the one person to whom she had instinctively turned in this crisis?

She had heard many things of Dean Fawcett—little incidents that had clothed him in a mantle of romance—and already, almost without understanding of the process, she felt that in this strong, silent, man of the North she had found a deep and lasting friendship. As she gazed frankly into his calm true eyes she could not but compare his manner with the Berserk rage of Steve which had frightened her, appalled her. If she went away on this journey with anyone, she would choose Fawcett.

And, as he had said, why not? What was to prevent them going—that very night? The sooner the better. Fawcett knew the country, the rivers, the lakes, the forest; they would be perfectly safe in his care. And she suddenly realized how she longed to see her guardian. . . . Le Pas two days. . . . She became conscious that Dorothy was eagerly urging her to accept the offer. She looked down and smiled, patting the girl's arm reassuringly.

“We will go,” she decided.

Eagerly they made their plans. They would go in the middle of the night—without the knowledge of anyone. It would be a surprise; but they would leave a letter for Steve and Gus, explaining. It was best that way, Fawcett said. So it was arranged.

Into a black and silver night, moon-rayed with

mystery, surged the canoe under the strong, steady strokes of Dean Fawcett. They had succeeded in stealing forth without discovery. A lantern had been burning in the tent occupied by Dureau and Maugers and, late as it was, they could hear the complaining voice of the New Yorker still yammering at his disgraced partner. From the other tent beyond came no sign or sound of life; yet they had not breathed freely until they were well out upon the lake.

If Joyce wondered that Fawcett had decreed a departure in stealth she dismissed the question without voicing it; Gus and Steve would have started to argue against the expedition no doubt and Steve undoubtedly would have insisted upon taking charge. She did not want it that way, but she had no inclination to explain to him why she preferred to go with Fawcett; she was not sure that she could put it into words satisfactorily, even analyze the strange impulse to herself. She did not try. She felt strangely content to discard responsibility—to drift off supinely—to be taken care of in this manner without fuss or agitation.

Fawcett made no attempt to keep up a conversation. Once he had made sure that his charges were well wrapped against the chill air, his paddle swung steadily and he held communion with his thoughts. Always cool, the nights were taking on the tang of the approaching winter season now. For a time the girls whispered to each other,

snuggled comfortably among the Hudson's Bay blankets; but as time passed, the undertones ceased. They dozed.

A contented smile lent a benign expression to the lined face of the man in the stern as he watched them. The thing he was doing assumed the proportions of a great adventure to him. It seemed to be a climax towards which his whole life had been ripening. He was convinced, as always, that the thing had been predestined; that he had been sent to the camp for this very purpose. Instincts so subtle as to be almost unnameable whispered to him that this was the first step in the fruition of his life. And he was content.

Out of the dark masses ahead of them little spots of red at last began to appear and disappear with the ever changing contour of the land. They were passing the Indian encampment and nearing the river. Even now the deep sullen roar of the rapids carried abroad to the keen ears of the woodsman and Fawcett, who knew every rock and turn, began to feel his first qualms. The river was bad enough to negotiate in the daytime, but at night and with two inexperienced girls. . . .

He called to Joyce gently, explaining what he wanted them to do. She aroused Dorothy. There was no danger if they kept their heads and it was essential that they shoot the rapids before pitching camp. It would look worse than it really was. In this manner he awakened them, keyed

them to what lay immediately ahead. He put in towards shore in order to change places with Joyce at the bow.

As the light craft felt the first pull of swift water and rose to the crest of it the girls could not restrain little muffled exclamations. He called out to them encouragingly. In tense sure language he instructed Joyce what to do in the rapids, adding that this one would be nothing extraordinary and that they would wait for daylight to negotiate the others.

Kneeling in the bow, his keen eyes piercing the gloom ahead, Fawcett braced himself. Now, they were into it! His paddle flashed skillfully as he kept steady time, bumping the canoe off the rocks. The spray drenched and half blinded them, but as Fawcett felt the mighty surge beneath him he bent to his work confidently, exultantly.

Great, fast moving masses of white foaming water seemed to illuminate even the shore shadows. The masses of jagged rock which lay in wait to destroy them were thrown into bold relief. The noise of it all was deafening. Then at last, when the girls had begun to think the tiny craft would surely be dashed to destruction, they swung in a curve high on the crest of water and swirled into swift running but comparatively calm water.

Dorothy giggled hysterically.

"Have we finished the river part of the trip?" she asked, a strange little catch in her voice.

"No. But that will be all for to-night," Fawcett replied. "We will pitch the tent right here, I think."

Almost as soon as the words were spoken the canoe bumped against the bank and Fawcett assisted them ashore. With wonderful speed he had a fire lighted and had erected the tiny tent which was part of his equipment.

Joyce's heart beat fast as she watched these preparations. Her mind flashed in retrospect. Many times had she planned just such an adventure as this. In actuality, how different it was! Yet she could not bring herself to regret the step they had taken. Standing by the blazing fire, she faced Fawcett squarely as he came towards her from the tent.

"Your quarters are ready, Miss Chetwood," he said simply.

"You have another tent for yourself?"

He smiled at her, the flames of the fire shining on his rugged face.

"Never mind me. I intend to keep the fire going. It will be cold." As if to illustrate his meaning he kicked a dried root into the heart of the fire.

The girl walked around and stood near him, silent for a moment. Then she reached out and grasped one of his hands in both of hers.

"Please believe me when I say that I—Dorothy and I—are more than grateful for what you are doing, Mr. Fawcett. I cannot explain how deeply I appreciate—there are many things that make—I cannot speak of them—things you do not know—" She broke off and her eyes filled with quick tears.

"Perhaps I know more than you can guess," he responded quietly, moved by the girl's troubled sweetness. "Nothing nor anyone shall harm you until you are safely in your guardian's care again."

His voice was vibrant with a tenderness which he sought to conceal. He turned away to the fire with an abrupt "Good-night."

Soon afterward, Dorothy, snuggled beside her inside the tent, was sound asleep. But Joyce, despite her weariness of mind and body, remained awake. She lay, watching Fawcett where he sat, his strong profile limned against the red glow of the fire. Every nerve of her was conscious of his stimulating presence. Who was he? Why had he taken such an interest in her? Did he really know more of her troubles than she thought as he had intimated?

Her thoughts grew troubled. Had she done the right thing in leaving the camp—and Steve? Was she leaving herself open—and Dorothy—to too many dangers? Remembering the frank, kindly eyes of Dean Fawcett, his self reliance, the something undefinable which had inspired her con-

fidence, she could not think that she had done wrong. It was for the best, as he had said. Already half the journey was over, she persuaded herself, and by to-morrow night they would be well on their way to Le Pas—and Winnipeg.

Her eyes closed drowsily. She thought of Steve --and was awake again. She felt the color flood her cheeks. What would he think? A queer tenderness seized her. . . . Her eyes, like troubled stars, closed once more. . . . Had she made a mistake? . . . She wondered dreamily.

CHAPTER XIV

THE first streak of dawn found Fawcett bending over the breakfast pots. The surrounding scene was magnificent. The river at this point had widened; above it entered with a mighty roar while below to the left it swung around and away out of sight in a whirl of mist and tumbling waters. It was cold and even Fawcett shivered in the chilly vapors. Not until he had the coffee-pot bubbling did he call the girls.

"No joke, shooting rapids, eh?" he greeted when they approached the cheery warmth of the fire. "Here, try this coffee; it will warm you up. Hope you've both had enough sleep."

"Won't you let me take hold now while you go and get some rest yourself, Mr. Fawcett? It's very early, isn't it?"

He hesitated.

"Well, no, not too early. You see, I expect that as soon as they find out—back at the camp—I don't want to be overtaken! I'm a bold, bad kidnapper, you see!" He laughed a little.

Her dark eyes questioned his. She had been brought up in a society where class lines were more or less closely drawn; but her experience gave her no precedence for action. She knew this

man only from the stories she had heard. This was her first real acquaintance with him. A kidnapper! The word startled her, even spoken in levity, as she knew he had spoken it. It had seemed so natural and honest—quite the right thing for them to do. Kidnapped!—she and Dorothy?

In spite of his rough garb he had a certain look of one well educated, a certain distinction. She noticed that now and then his hand had a trick of stealing up to caress his face. She wondered at this until she recalled quite suddenly his fondness for a clean shave.

Fawcett must have become conscious of her curiosity. He said:

“It is unfortunate, but I have forgotten my shaving things. I guess I’ll have to wait until I reach Le Pas, eh?” His cool, grey eyes continued to meet hers for a moment, then wavered.

“Why do you bother about such things?—here, at such a time?” she asked and his smiling eyes grew blank for an instant.

“Well, you know—one likes to be respectable—More coffee, Miss Dorothy?”

“And your life in the North,” persisted Joyce, “you like it? I have heard a great deal about you and your work among the Indians. Now that I have you to myself where you can’t possibly get away, I warn you that I am going to pump you dry, as they say. I’m really tremendously in-

terested, Mr. Fawcett. You will talk to us about your work, won't you?"

He still hesitated, looking at her rather oddly.

"Oh, it's nothing—nothing at all that would interest you. I will tell you some stories if you like—later on maybe. Just now—breakfast please. I have been up here many years and I have liked it." He waved his hand at the beautiful scene around them. "Who wouldn't?" he challenged. "Yes, I have found the life interesting and the little good I may have done has brought me pleasure for ample reward; but that's all over now—that is, I—" He paused,

"You intend to stay away from the North?" questioned Joyce with a surprised lift of the eyebrows. "What has happened to make you change your life so suddenly?"

She had guessed that there was a mystery somewhere in this man's life, that he must have some good reason for burying himself away in this wilderness all these years. It intrigued her. Perhaps Fawcett was not his true name at all! She had no intention of putting any emphasis on her question, although her words implied it—bluntly.

"I think I will now." He answered only the first of the two questions and a certain tired look settled upon his face like a mask. She saw that her inquisitiveness was embarrassing him and desisted.

"Oh, but isn't it wonderful!" Dorothy cried

from the edge of the riverbank where she had been drinking in the wild beauty of the churning rapids. She skipped back to the fire. "Did we come through that—in the dark, Mr. Fawcett?" She shuddered, thinking of the nightmare that had disturbed her slumber. "N'yum-yum! but that bacon smells good!"

Breakfast finished, preparations were soon made to continue the trip and the girls joined Fawcett down by the river where he had already launched the canoe. It tugged and strained, mute evidence of the powerful influence exerted by the senseless brawl of fast water above and below. He motioned to Joyce to step into the canoe. She settled herself obediently and he turned to Dorothy, holding out his hand.

It all happened in a twinkling. It might have been carelessness upon the young girl's part—perhaps some freak twist of the current; at any rate, as Dorothy made a motion to grasp the gunwale of the canoe, it slipped away. Her body, poised uncertainly, almost overbalanced, and only Fawcett's quick clutch with both hands prevented her from falling into the water.

But the canoe! In that brief instant of release it was gone! It needed not the terrified scream of Dorothy to apprise Fawcett of the danger. Rapidly the canoe swept into the current. The white scared face of Joyce Chetwood, turned

to him in mute appeal—one glimpse of that he had before he plunged.

Wildly he lurched his body through the water for the receding stern. It was gathering momentum, but he got a hand on it—just as it entered the high black gorge of the first rapid. A mighty heave and he succeeded in throwing the weight of his body upon the stern. There was no time for more as they were whirled away. His weight settled the canoe into a more natural position and he just had time to whisper a few hoarse words of encouragement before they struck the first white teeth of the mad waters.

Swish! To attempt to climb in was folly! Desperately he clung on. He hoped that he would be able to retain his grip and keep the craft clear of the rocks.

Rushing, swerving, leaping in the cold green water! The cold was numbing! He knew that he was fighting for very life—both their lives! Not for one instant did he think that they would pull through—impossible! Yet he would fight—ah! that was close!—fight to the last.

Clamor!—it was awful! It could not last—exhaustion! For seconds at a time he went completely under water—came up, blowing, shaking his head—hanging on! Whatever he did he must hang on! It was the only chance.

Zip! they swept past masses of rocks at lightning speed, barely escaping the jagged edges. Yet

the water seemed to heave them away. A few moments more and they would be through safely—God in Heaven!—The canoe slewed sharply—Crash!

Submerged boulder! The girl's shriek rang in his ears! He cast loose from the useless weight of the broken canoe. The worst had happened! His head bobbed above the swirling surface. He dashed the water from his eyes, frantically searching the tumbling pandemonium about him.

There she was! Superhuman strength he threw into his stroke. Twelve yards away—not more!—her head had appeared for an instant!—just a glimpse! Cursing impotently, he felt himself flung into a wide pool. He was travelling round and round with slow precision and it took him a moment to understand the meaning of that apparent calmness. The smother of boiling spray was gone, but this—a whirlpool! All the forces of waters above here coagulated in a swirling powerful current which would suck down anything that came within its clutch.

He gazed about frantically—and saw her, a few feet distant. He struck out wildly and just as he reached for her floating hair, she disappeared. He cried aloud to Heaven and waited, tired, numbed limbs like dead weights, almost refusing to obey the motion he willed.

Joyce was past struggling. Her unconscious body reappeared suddenly quite close to him. A

mad clutch and he had her; they went under together. But he did not lose his senses. With his last remaining strength he struck frantically for shore—dragging—dragging. That glimpse of the girl's still white face drove him onward—through the confusing chaos, the roaring in his ears. Weights hung upon him—everlasting weights—pulling him—his foot struck! He struggled ashore and sank there with his burden.

The rays of the morning sun came down through the narrow cleft above, warming his face. His brain cleared. His spent lungs heaved less painfully and he got to his knees. Something fine and tender transformed the hard drawn lines of his face as he knelt there beside the inert body of the girl whose life he had saved.

Or had he saved her? She was so white! Alarmed suddenly, he came to his senses. He felt in his pockets for his waterproof match-safe. He muttered a prayer of thankfulness as he found it. In a few moments he had a fire roaring and proceeded skillfully to resuscitate her.

Dorothy arrived, white and terrified by way of the rocky portage trail. Under his direction she rendered what help she could and they had the satisfaction soon of noting signs of returning life. They moved her closer to the fire and while Dorothy removed wet clothing and chafed her foster sister's wrists and ankles, Fawcett quickly rigged up a rude tepee of saplings and spruce

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boughs, entirely unconscious of his bleeding fingers.

“Put her in here. You must get those clothes dry as soon as possible. Thank God, she is coming around!”

At sound of his voice Joyce opened her eyes—and smiled faintly. Joyfully he smiled back at her, spoke gentle words of encouragement, his eyes suddenly blinded by tears of relief.

CHAPTER XV

IT was just about this time that Sergeant Steve Hardy stood in the doorway of the cabin, back at the camp, biting his lip and scowling heavily out across the lake. In his clenched hand he held Fawcett's brief letter of explanation, telling where he was taking the young women and why. Explanation? Steve kicked savagely at a bit of dry stick in his path as he went in search of Gus Jonsen.

He was in no mood to bandy words and he wasted no time in issuing his commands. He had decided to use his authority to straighten out the tangle into which everything appeared to be getting. He told Maugers and Dureau bluntly that they were under detention at the camp for two weeks and that if they knew what was good for them they would remain there quietly until he returned or sent word to the contrary. Meanwhile they would be in charge of Jonsen who had full authority to see that his instructions were obeyed to the letter.

Maugers was sullen; he said nothing, knowing full well that there were several counts upon which the mounted police could arrest him, and he had no stomach for running foul of these blood-

hounds of the North. Dureau spluttered, of course; but there was a dangerous glint in the young officer's cold eye that took the vehemence out of his protest. More was to be gained by placating than antagonizing further and he was quite ready to admit that Mangers had been an idiotic fool. They would remain at the camp, as requested. It was what he intended to do anyway—until Martin Hardy returned.

Gus grinned to himself as he got Steve's canoe ready for him. He was not worrying about the safety of the two runaways; in fact, he was rather relieved to have them off his hands and Miss Joyce's scribbled note to him had satisfied him that she knew what she was doing. Also, the prospect of having these two crooks at his mercy for a couple of weeks was highly pleasing to him. He waved cheerfully at the departing canoe.

Steve's face was grim as he set out. He hardly knew what to think of this new development. The facts in his possession were too meagre, too unrelated, to allow of intelligent deductions. Was it possible that Fawcett, too, was mixed up in the mystery? Hardly that. But if not, what was his game? Or was he merely acting upon the request of Joyce Chetwood? She had asked him to take her in his canoe and it might well be that she had asked him further to take Dorothy and her away from the camp altogether—to meet her guardian, as the crumpled letter in his pocket intimated.

But why in the middle of the night like this? Why in the night? He had no fault to find with the idea of the girls' departure from the camp under the circumstances; he had even debated suggesting that course himself. But to slip away in the night—as if everybody in the camp was as big a blackguard as Maugers and Dureau! That was what hurt. Why could they not have taken him into their confidence? Why was Joyce treating him like this—shunning him? What had he done? It hurt him to the quick.

They would be quite safe with Dean Fawcett, of course. He knew the country they would traverse on their way to Le Pas. Steve had often discussed it with him. It was quite like Fawcett to come and go as he pleased without consulting anyone, only in this case—why he was a complete stranger to these girls. Yet Joyce had actually requested Fawcett—!

He gave it up with a mutter of irritation. It suited his plans to go to Le Pas at once. He wanted to have a talk with his mother. He was not following the trio, or anything like that; yet his paddle swung unceasingly and it is doubtful if he had ever made better time than he was doing now.

He put in to Beaver Landing with the idea of finding out when the little steamer was next likely to arrive at the Lower Landing. It was lucky that he did for there almost the first man he encount-

ered was Dean Fawcett, dickering with a half-breed over a canoe.

It did not take long for Steve to learn about the accident. He stared at Fawcett, listening anxiously, the many questions he had to ask about other things relegated to the background for the time being. Fawcett, without canoe or supplies, had been forced to make his way on foot back to the Landing over a twelve mile stretch of the roughest kind of travelling. It had been slow going and he was impatient to get away with the supplies he had just purchased and return to the hungry girls before dark.

With the arrival of Steve and his avowed intent of going on to Le.Pas at once, it was unnecessary to buy a canoe as there was room in Steve's for the entire party. They lost no time in getting on their way.

"You got my note?"

"Yes, I got it."

Fawcett's eyes crinkled. He had guessed before that there was an affair developing between the young sergeant and Joyce Chetwood; if there had been any doubt of it in his mind, it was dispelled now by the evident strain in the boy's manner.

"Why did you do it, Dean?" the latter presently demanded.

"Because I thought it was for the best."

"Yes, I know that. I was going to make the

suggestion myself this morning. That part of it is all right. But why sneak away in the night without telling a fellow—?”

“Let’s talk about that some other time, Steve.”

“No, I want to know now.”

“Listen to me!” commanded Fawcett sharply. “If there’s to be any fool argument about this thing, we’ll put about—back to the Landing and I’ll hire that canoe after all. Do you understand that? These girls are in no condition to be talked to by a hot-headed young fool like you. You’ve already frightened them so badly—”

“Frightened them!” gasped Steve in amazement. “For the love of heaven! How?”

“That’s what I said—scared them stiff—that damned temper of yours! Get a check-rein on it!

“As for the rest of it—my reason for taking a hand—you know me,” Fawcett continued. “You know me—always trying to help out, to make the best of a situation. I want to do the right thing and I thought I was doing it.” He paused and they paddled in silence. “But I guess I’m like the log that gets in the backwater of a fast river—you know? The river goes on rushing by and the log is left behind—stranded. Well, that’s me. I’m stranded now. If I can trust you to keep your head, I’m quite willing to leave the young ladies in your care—to complete what I intended to do. I go my own way again and life passes on as before. . . .”

Steve ruminated. He felt suddenly diffident at the prospective meeting with Joyce, let alone usurping Fawcett's place.

"Nothing doing, Dean! You started this trip and by gum, you'll finish it—and pay us a visit at Le Pas. I guess I can't be trusted!" he finished a little bitterly.

They shot the first rapid without mishap—and the second—and swept into the backwater. Fawcett's shout brought Dorothy out of the tepee with a squeal of welcome. Then Steve's heart leaped as he saw Joyce, still looking rather wan. He sprang ashore and went towards her, his bronzed face full of concern.

A faint flush stained her cheeks; but she said nothing—only gave him her hand and smiled. He talked eagerly—of practical things. They must be starved! After a bite to eat, if she felt strong enough, they intended to go on to the Lower Landing right away. The steamer was expected any hour now, if it had not arrived already, and that was a piece of luck. They would be able to go aboard that very night.

It was a piece of luck and soon everybody was bustling around. Joyce's spirits revived apace and when she had eaten a good meal she avowed that she felt strong enough for anything. A little later they came out at the Lower Landing to find the small, flat-bottomed steamer moored to the

pier, discharging passengers and freight, having just arrived.

They had no difficulty securing accommodation for the trip down the lakes to Le Pas. As is generally the case, few passengers went south and Captain Lester welcomed them gladly. Joyce had travelled on the tiny steamer so often that she was well acquainted with its genial skipper and once they had pulled away and were heading for the Narrows—a matter of half an hour later—she sought him out. She went boldly up the ladder to the bridge, feeling more like her old self than she had for days; for the moment she had forgotten the spectre of suspicion and blackmail that had been haunting her and the face which peered over the rail at Captain Lester was full of vivacity.

He fairly whooped in recognition. Fawcett, who was also on the bridge, turned with pleasure at her fresh appearance.

“Just going down to get a wash up, Miss Joyce. We are changing the watch now, Captain. Better keep his mind on navigation,” he added with loudly simulated secrecy, “or the old scow will be stuck on a mudbank all night!”

The captain snorted.

“Mudbank!—Old Scow!”—He winked at her merrily. “Well, well, but this is a fine surprise! And how are you?” He called over the rail to his mate to come up and release him.

"It's rather a surprise trip for Dorothy and me, too," she laughed. "Mr. Fawcett is simply wonderful!"

"He sure is. . . . Shoot the rapids? He's one of the few men I'd trust to bring you safe through The Gap. She's a bad one."

Joyce nodded, her face sobering quickly.

"I'm expectin' to take the 'old man' up next trip," Lester rattled on the while he drank in the girl's fresh beauty.

"Daddy? Oh, are you sure?"

"Have a letter from him—" He felt in his pockets. "No, I must have left it in the cabin. Anyways, he said he would be returnin' by the next boat sure an' you'll be able to meet him at Le Pas. Asked me to reserve his usual cabin."

"By the next boat?" For a moment only she hesitated. "Then you had better save one for Dorothy and me, too. He is coming back sooner than I expected or we would not have started out. We thought perhaps we could get to Winnipeg before he left some shopping, you know," she finished lamely.

Her eyes were shining as she went back to the deck. Her guardian was returning—coming straight back to the camp as soon as possible. Knowing this man Dureau was there but coming back by the first boat he could make—did that look as if he had been running away? Not much! The fact that any doubt of him had entered her mind

for an instant brought the blood to her face in a tingle of shame. He would know what to do—how to deal with the situation; he would make this New Yorker—

The look of happy confidence faded from her face even as she told herself everything would come out all right in the end. Once more the remembrance of Martin Hardy's disquietude brought the old thoughts trooping back upon her to disturb her. Once more the terrible menace of Jean Dureau's lies—they must be lies! But he was so sure of himself. . . . What, oh what did he know that placed her guardian in his power? She felt helpless to fathom it. The sleepless hours she had spent upon the problem always ended thus—in helpless dismay.

Down in her heart she longed to go to Steve and bare her soul. She felt that she must tell someone soon. She had told Fawcett all she dared. That was it—she dare not even repeat what Dureau had said, lies though they were, until she had talked with her guardian. She could not tell Steve; his passions were too quickly aroused. She thought of him as a big, untamed animal, lovable and big-hearted but. . . . No, it would never do to tell him for fear of the excessive lengths to which his anger might carry him if he knew the truth.

Night's mantle already wrapped the wilderness. The moon had not yet come up but the sky

was dotted with myriads of stars. From the smoke-stack of the little steamer sparks flew, radiating for brief seconds before they vanished against the velvet darkness. Joyce picked her way along the diminutive promenade deck to a seat under the bridge, a snug little corner, sheltered from the cool night breeze. Here she gave herself up to her troubled thoughts while the boat droned and throbbed its lonesome way into the wilderness night.

Behind her a splash of light indicated the opening of a cabin door. The luminous end of Steve's cigar was almost upon her before she was aware of his presence. She drew back in curious trepidation at his approach even while, paradoxically enough, she was glad to have him near. The black shape of him stopped and she knew that he was peering at her.

"Is that you—Joyce?" he asked softly.

She laughed nervously as she made room for him.

"It's a lovely night, isn't it?"

"I have been looking for you. I—I wanted to talk to you."

"And I was just thinking how short the summers are. It is cool enough for a fur coat tonight. You will help to keep the wind off me—Steve."

He looked at her silently. She was cold, yet she had permitted the heavy shawl to slip from

her shoulders. He reached out and replaced it, drawing it up snug to her throat, and she thanked him with a smile. A desire to seize her and hold her tight in his arms possessed him and he started to withdraw his arm hastily; but just then she leaned back and to his embarrassment he found that the arm was imprisoned. He made no further attempt to rescue it and a moment later it encircled her waist. Her luminous eyes looked up at him quickly and they smiled at each other.

"Have you been very cross at me?" he asked. "What is it that I have done to offend you? Don't you know that there is nothing I wouldn't do—?" She stopped him with a gesture of appeal. "If I have been rude or anything like that, I am sorry," he murmured contritely.

"Please, Steve! It— isn't that."

"Then what? I think I know. I—my exhibition of temper—it scared you, eh? Was that it?"

She nodded diffidently.

"I—am almost afraid to tell you things for fear of what you might do—Please let us not talk any more about it."

Her admission startled him. It brought him once more to a fuller realization of the fault against which he had so often struggled in vain and his ears burned in the dark.

"I am sorry," he faltered. "Fighting is not a pretty thing to watch; but it's the only thing a

beast like Mangers understands. I have a bad temper all right and I am sorry if I frightened you. But nobody's going to harm you while I'm around—!" He checked himself sharply and presently looked at her whimsically. "There are occasions, you know, when a fellow can scarcely be expected to offer a man a cigar!"

"Look! There comes the moon!" She pointed to where the sky was silvering with a growing glamor. Together they watched it rise majestically and cast its spell upon the landscape. His arm tightened about her.

"Joyce, I—there is something—I love you."

The words came from his heart, unrehearsed—so low that he hardly knew that he was speaking them aloud. But he could feel the sudden tremble of her body against his. She stood up abruptly, nervously removing his arm.

"I must go in. Dorothy—will be wondering what has become of me," she said hastily. "Please let me go, Steve."

But he detained her.

"I have learned a good deal during the past few days," he said gravely, "but there remain many things to have explained to me—"

"I cannot explain! You must not ask me to answer your questions. I do not know what you have learned. Surely you can see I do not wish to say more—not now—I am not ready for it. It is no time for sentiment. What I do is my own

affair—or, rather, it concerns others—Oh, please try not to misunderstand!”

He stared at her, surprised. Her voice had broken with an emotion which left him perplexed at her words. Her carefree manner was gone and he saw that her hands were clasped tightly together while her eyes entreated him.

“I want to know what has happened since I saw you last,” he demanded quietly. “What is it?”

“Something terrible,” she whispered. “I dare not tell you! It—is not my right to speak of it—not yet. But it makes all the difference—you and me—”

“It can not!” he protested, aghast. “Whatever it is that is making you act so strangely—Listen, Joyce!” He caught her by the shoulders and gazed almost fiercely into her eyes. “Nothing on God’s earth—!”

“Release me, please,” she commanded coldly. “You are forgetting yourself! I do not wish to discuss this further!”

He fell back a step, dismayed. In that instant she walked away from him.

He went to the rail and gripped it in an effort to master the surge of feeling that almost overpowered him.

“What can it be? What can it be that has entered her life—that could make any difference between us?” he whispered fiercely to the stars.

Over and over again he conned the incidents of the past week without reaching any satisfactory conclusion. Maugers? Dureau?—everything had been all right until he came. It must have something to do with the deal for the claim. But no. “Something terrible,” she had said. The girl was positively terrified! These men were strangers comparatively. What could have terrified her like that? Could it be possible that it had anything to do with this mystery in which his own affairs were tangled—Martin Hardy?—his father?”

Unconsciously his hand strayed to the photograph inside his tunic. In the cold moonlight he examined it once more. And as he gazed fondly upon it his mind relaxed; it was as if something of the calm confidence of that highbred face were imparting itself to him.

“Nothing—nothing in the world can come between! I swear it!” he murmured.

Steadily southward the tiny vessel churned its way upon the silver water beneath the peaceful stars.

CHAPTER XVI

AS if to justify Dean Fawcett's humorous warning, Captain Lester's little steamer became stranded on a mudbank as she pursued her zig-zag course down the Big Stone Rapids. As a consequence it was quite late and dark when they arrived at Le Pas.

They stood for a moment, surveying the busy scene around them and thoughts of what had happened since last she had been there crowded upon Joyce Chetwood. A lump choked her throat and her eyes filmed, but she turned finally and with a certain shyness grasped Steve's arm. Whatever lay before her, he held her love; she drew what comfort she could from the knowledge, even while her secret heart was filled with forebodings.

Fawcett and Dorothy had gone ahead and the young girl's chatter of curiosity came back to them, punctuated by the woodsman's deep-voiced replies. Steve's home lay in the northwest corner of the little Northern town. It had been decided as soon as he had joined the party that the two girls must remain with Steve's mother at Le Pas until the train arrived from Winnipeg; they had planned to board it on its return trip to the prairie

metropolis. The knowledge that her guardian would be aboard that train when it arrived and would immediately go to his cabin on Captain Lester's steamer which they were just leaving Joyce kept to herself; for she half expected that he might be delayed and she did not want to arouse Dorothy's hopes only to disappoint her.

Their way took them up dark and silent streets, mere trails trodden through the bush. The two in the rear walked silently for the most part; each felt that the moment transcended the mere commonplace of trivial conversation. Steve held open the little lattice gate for them and just then the front door opened, letting out a flood of light that illuminated in bold relief the features of an elderly woman who stood in the doorway.

"Hello, mother!" cried Steve. He sprang ahead towards her and the greeting thrilled Joyce who had been feeling increasingly uneasy.

"Steve, boy! But this is a grand surprise!" she called out gladly and in a moment mother and son embraced. He had some difficulty in making her understand that there was company present.

With a happy laugh she bid them all welcome and led the way into the cheery sitting-room. Mrs. Hardy was a woman who could not fail to attract interest. Of medium height with white hair which almost encircled her face, she appeared just then in her vivacity almost beautiful. Yet there was a poise that lent dignity and a hint of

sympathy in her deep grey eyes that bespoke a certain repression. In repose, there would be seriousness, even a vague sadness in her, Joyce thought.

In the sitting-room they were introduced to a caller who had arisen at their entry and whom Steve greeted heartily. Inspector O'Malley, of the Royal Mounted, was by no means the martinet—at least not in these surroundings. He had known Steve since early boyhood and Lucy Hardy he had known always, it seemed. The intimacy between the big Irishman and these two was apparent in the utter disregard of official relationships. Steve's superior officer he might be in official circles; but here he was merely the fatherly old friend.

O'Malley shook hands quite formally with Dorothy and Fawcett. His stern old eyes, however, lingered searchingly upon Joyce's winsome countenance and he seemed entirely unaware that he still held her hand.

"You are Miss—Chetwood, was it? Ah, yes!" His belated smile relieved her embarrassment. Fawcett glanced at him sharply and turned away.

Mrs. Hardy was quick to note the fatigue of the girls and stood on no ceremony in courteously taking charge of them. Her sincere welcome quickly put them at ease and she made them feel that the opportunity of having them as guests in her home was a pleasure to her. The accommoda-

tions were limited; but it was soon arranged that the men should spend the night with O'Malley. Fawcett was insistent that he go to a hotel; but this O'Malley would not permit, literally taking possession of his guest as they bade the others goodnight.

Steve remained behind for a few moments with his mother. She came downstairs presently and they hugged each other with abandon. Then abruptly she held him at arms' length and gazed at him through her tears.

"It is Miss Chetwood, Steve? It was her photo you sent me. She is the one you are in love with?"

"Eh?"

"You do not need to deny the fact or feel ashamed, Steve. I understand you so well, my dear boy!"

He nodded, the color of his tanned cheeks deepening slightly at the confession. He looked up eagerly.

"She's wonderful, mother! Isn't she?" he demanded, impulsively grasping her hand.

"I—Yes, I think I—like her, Steve." His mother suddenly placed her arms about his neck and drew him to her, patting him, hiding her face in his shoulder in order that he might not see how deeply moved she was. She had known that some day this thing would come upon her—another to share her boy's love; but she had hoped that this was but a passing fancy for a pretty face. The

realization that it was more vital pained her deeply. But she smiled bravely up at him presently and kissed him goodnight and sent him off to O'Malley; so that he did not see how dull and hopeless her eyes became or how quickly her face seemed to age after the door was shut behind him.

She sank into the nearest chair, gazing with unseeing eyes across the little sitting-room with its familiar furniture, while there came trooping upon her a host of recollections. Shadows of the past seemed to be creeping in upon her from the dim corners of the room, reaching to wrest from her the only happiness she had known.

"The ward of Martin Hardy!" she breathed. "The ward of Martin Hardy! Can it be the same? Oh, if I could only be sure! Dear God! have I not suffered enough?"

She bowed her head upon her arm and for a long time she did not move.

For a while Dean Fawcett walked in silence beside the big-hearted Irishman who retained his grip on the woodsman's arm as if he was afraid of losing him in the darkness of the side street. His mind was in a state bordering upon consternation and the one thing uppermost was a stubborn determination that he absolutely must refuse the hospitality of the Inspector's cottage, no matter how friendly the invitation. But it must be done

in a certain way or his very refusal might arouse suspicion and defeat his own carefully laid plans. Already he was beginning to wonder if O'Malley's grip on his arm—He felt his four days' growth of beard anxiously under cover of the darkness. He must make straight for a barber-shop.

O'Malley seemed to be unusually voluble to-night. He talked of the Hardys, mother and son, for the most part—what a wonderful youngster the boy was turning out to be, the logical result of having such a wonderful mother. He told Fawcett what a lot Steve had said about this strange hermit friend of his up in the woods and reports had come in from many other sources about his work among the Indians. O'Malley had been wanting to meet him for a long time and he was looking forward right now to a long talk about conditions in the northland. He carefully refrained from asking questions, however, as they walked along; it was as if he kept up a stream of talk with some definite object. Fawcett's taciturnity, therefore, passed unnoticed.

Or did it? O'Malley released his arm when they reached the first lighted street and there was a penetration in his keen glance at his companion that made the latter ill at ease. The woodsman's face was set with resolution; little beads of moisture had gathered upon his forehead.

"Look here, Inspector," he began suddenly, stopping in his tracks. "You'll have to excuse me

from going on with you. I—it is more than kind of you, but—”

“Nonsense!” objected O’Malley. “I’ve told you already the hotels are crowded and you’re more than welcome—Come along, I want to talk to you, man! You really do me a great favor—”

“I am sorry, but my time is very limited at Le Pas. I—have a lot of business to attend to—lot of people to see—and I’ll only be here for a couple of days. I have no time, really, for social calls—” He met the keen blue eyes steadily. “You understand how it is?”

O’Malley smiled slowly.

“I understand—Fawcett,” he nodded. “You go north again?”

“Yes.”

“In two days?”

“Yes—about that.”

“And you won’t have time to call back and see Steve’s mother, you mean? She will be greatly disappointed, I’m afraid. Steve has talked about you so much—Why are you afraid of her?”

“Afraid? Well—yes, if you like.”

“Why?” demanded O’Malley bluntly.

“Because I can’t trust myself yet. I feel so—such a fool in the presence of women—”

“Rubbish! You’ve been too long up there—with the Indians. You ought to fight this desire to run away—Fawcett.”

Again that slight pause before pronouncing the

name. The woodsman stiffened and gave the other look for look.

"I have said that I am very busy and will not have time for social calls, Inspector," he protested with quiet dignity. "If I find I can make time for it, I shall be honored to call again upon Steve's mother. I think very highly of her."

O'Malley grunted.

"You refuse to stop beneath my roof, then?"

"Don't put it that way, Inspector. I will be busy and the hotel will be much more convenient for me."

"Very well. Have it your own way—Fawcett. But I will want to talk to you, just the same."

In spite of himself the woodsman looked startled.

"You will give me your word of honor that you will come and see me—to-morrow forenoon some time, let us say—at the barracks."

It was not an interrogative, but a decisive statement, a command. Fawcett looked at him steadily, then slowly nodded his head.

"I will come. It will be a pleasure."

"Good! Yes, of course,—a pleasure. And—who knows?—perhaps a little business to make it worth while."

He smiled as he said it and with the smile some of the sternness departed from his manner. Fawcett was conscious of a growing liking—and put

it down resentfully. Under other circumstances, perhaps—He decided on a bold stroke.

"You look at me, Inspector, as if I reminded you of someone you had met before?"

It was O'Malley's turn to be startled; but he was too severely trained to give evidence of it.

"Yes," he admitted promptly. "The more I look at you the more you remind me—of someone else."

Fawcett laughed easily.

"It's the beard. Great similarity in beards, Inspector. I forgot my shaving tackle on this trip; but I'm going to a barber right now. You are merely confusing me with some other bearded identity."

"Perhaps you're right," said O'Malley, eyeing him speculatively. "Ever in the Klondyke?"

He shot the question suddenly; but Fawcett answered readily, his words sharp and clear.

"No, sir! You are entirely mistaken, Inspector. Well, I had better be trotting along to the barber's—before I'm arrested, eh?"

They laughed as they shook hands.

"Good-night, then. To-morrow forenoon—don't forget," warned O'Malley.

"I have said I'd be on hand," and with that he wheeled abruptly and was gone.

Inspector O'Malley stood motionless, watching the tall figure swinging off into the shadows, and a frown of concentration puckered his brow. He

was so absorbed that he did not hear Steve's approach until the latter touched his elbow.

"Was that Dean who just left you? Where's he going?"

"I find your friend Fawcett a most entertaining individual, Steve. He has just told me as fine a lie as I ever listened to—told it damned well!"

"Who? Fawcett?" cried Steve in amazement. "Old Dean never lies. He hates a liar as badly as I do."

"When was he in the Klondyke?"

"During the gold rush—'97 or '98."

"He told you that he was there?"

"Why, yes, there's never been any secret about that. . . ."

"He has just told me that he was never in the Klondyke!" Inspector O'Malley's voice had taken on a crispness of decision. "Steve, I know that man. What's more, he knows me. His name is not Fawcett!"

Sergeant Steve Hardy gripped the arm of his chief in quick alarm. O'Malley was always dangerous when he spoke like that.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was the quiet, grey-haired master barber himself, owner of the establishment, who shaved Fawcett and it took all his gentleness and skill to make a good job of it. Whiskers of every variety and every degree of wiryness were his daily portion and he was not unused to irritable lumberjacks with abrasions requiring circumspection upon his part. He had learned not to be too inquisitive with certain of his customers and he soon put this stranger in the same category; so he asked no questions, although he studied the man with some curiosity as he worked over him patiently, this patron who endured with all the stoicism and silence of an Indian.

From the poolroom beyond came the constant click of ivory balls, a medley of voices, the stale reek of cigar smoke; but Dean Fawcett was only subconsciously aware of his surroundings, so concentrated was his mind upon other things.

The sudden meeting with O'Malley had almost stunned him. It had been a long time since he had visited Le Pas and while he had known of the new Inspector's appointment to the territory and had heard Steve talk about him, it had never occurred to Fawcett to associate this particular O'Malley

with *the* O'Malley—that man of long ago, the very memory of whom brought a qualm of fear. It was Fate! But for the wild excitement of the past few days, the quick fruition of things he had almost given up hoping for, he might have been more discreet. Even his forgetfulness of such a simple thing as his razor—Damn that beard! O'Malley had not forgotten; promotion had not affected the Inspector's uncanny memory for faces nor had Time's changes been sufficient to overcome a haunting suspicion.

Had O'Malley recognized him? It looked that way. The request for his presence at the bar-backs to-morrow was not without its own quieting significance; but it was a request that could not be refused. To think that this should happen just as he had everything shaping so nicely! He must succeed; so much depended upon that success! so very much! If only he would be given time to complete his plans, then anything could happen for all he cared. He must steel himself to complete control of his feelings; for the situation demanded above all else that he keep a cool head.

Fawcett had not spent the past twenty years of his life, roughing it, without the burning sun and the fierce northern winds entering into character as well as body. He was a man of peace; yet he was not without a strain of wildness, even hard-rock "cussedness", and from his youth he had

been a fighter. He did not find it easy to bow to the thought that O'Malley had recognized him and as a consequence his plans would miscarry. After what he had fought for and so nearly won it galled his pride to think of surrendering now. He would fight to the last.

The first thing was to get the girls safely away on the train to Winnipeg. That would leave him free to complete the daring plan which he had first conceived when he read Dureau's message that morning in Gus Jonsen's tent. O'Malley and O'Malley alone stood between him and the justice of his own making, the plan by which in his own way he would wipe out the great wrong that had rankled in his heart through all the years. Then he would be satisfied, would give himself up and end the suspense. Given time, he knew he could do it; without it he would be as helpless as Samson, shorn of his locks.

From the barber-shop, feeling greatly refreshed and smelling strongly of Bay rum, he went straight to the little railway station where he learned that the train from Winnipeg would arrive about seven o'clock the following morning and would leave again at four in the afternoon. As he stood at the end of the platform and looked towards the scattered lights of the town, he made his decision. The girls must leave on that train—unless the person he was expecting arrived next morning! Anything might happen then, he

realized; but it was hardly likely that the particular passenger in whom he was interested would reach Le Pas for two or three days yet.

On the way back from the depot he was fortunate enough to meet Captain Lester, whose pride in his little northern vessel found expression in gold letters upon the band of his peaked cap—"S.S. *Nipwam*." The Captain was in a great hurry, as well he might be with a night shift already at work under gasoline flares over at the dock, loading the huge scow which the *Nipwam* would push ahead of her, going north. It left little enough time between arrival and departure for all there was to do; but the season was getting late and there seemed to be no end to the stream of prospectors who were eager to stake claims before transportation by water came to a close.

"Hey, captain! You're the very man I'm looking for."

"Fawcett, for God's sake, don't you tell me you're going back this trip and want me to reserve you a berth! It can't be done. There's an awful crowd going up."

"Not this trip, Tom. Put me down for the next trip, though."

Lester turned and cast shrewd eyes over the groups of men who thronged the street, khaki-clad, clad in mackinaws, clad in a variety of things.

"Take a boatload of 'em up every time now,"

he declared. "Guess there must be something to it, eh?"

"Yes, but it's taken them a long time to find it out."

"Did you know there was anything up there?"

"For the past twenty years. . . . Anyone that I know, going up this trip?"

Lester turned on him suddenly, his eyes narrowing in surprise.

"Why, sure there is—old man Hardy and his girls."

"What's that?"

"Sure Mike! I thought you'd know. I just got a wire from Hardy, saying he'd be in for sure on the morning train. The girls came down to meet him, didn't they?"

"They were going on to Winnipeg—"

"Yes, I was talking to Miss Chetwood and she told me; but when she heard that the old gentleman had a cabin reserved for this trip, she promptly copped one for her sister and her too."

As he spoke he watched Fawcett's face. All along, he had felt that something unusual had happened up North and he was not without a natural curiosity.

For a moment Fawcett said nothing, his head bent in thought. The news was unexpected and important. Joyce, thinking she would be safe with her guardian, was prepared to go back with him; but in view of the quick developments that

were taking place Fawcett had no desire to have the girls at the camp. He looked up quickly.

"You have known me a long time, Tom. Do you trust me? Do you trust me absolutely and without question?"

"Why, sure, Dean! You know I do," replied Lester, his surprise at the question showing unmistakably in his bluff countenance.

"Think I could be trusted with two young girls? Miss Chetwood and Miss Hardy, to be exact?"

Captain Lester rolled his quid and stared. He knew Fawcett was "white"; everyone did, for that matter. But what the devil was he asking a question like that for? Fawcett broke in on his puzzled thoughts.

"Tom, these girls must not go north—not this trip, Hardy or no Hardy. They have got to go to Winnipeg to-morrow—or, at least, they have got to remain here."

"Well, I'll be—!"

"I guess Hardy will make straight for ship-board. He's not expecting to meet anyone. As soon as possible after the train gets in I want you to pull out. The sooner the better. Do you understand?"

"And leave the girls behind?" Lester gasped.

"Exactly."

"But—Holy smoke, Dean! do you know what you're asking me to do?" His whole expression was one of amazement. The character of his old

friend, Fawcett, might be quite all right; everything might be all right. But there were others to be affected—his whole passenger list—and his smile had in it a suggestion of reserve.

Fawcett's face was set with determination and he spoke more intensely now.

"I know all that, Lester. I know what you want to say and it is all to your credit; but—" He paused and looked straight into the skipper's eyes. "It is very unwise for these girls to go—this trip. They must not—for their own safety. You have got to help me prevent it. No, don't ask why, for I can't tell you that just now. Something has happened up north. It is unsafe!"

"Ah!" His surmise had been correct, then. "But Hardy—surely he—"

"He does not know yet what has taken place. The girls themselves are not really aware of the danger. All you can be sure of is that what I say is true and of the utmost importance to all concerned. I give you my word that the young ladies will be taken care of in the meantime. I will go north with you on your next trip—to settle things."

"To settle things?" repeated Captain Lester. "Sounds interesting."

"Will you do this for me, Tom?" He faced Lester squarely.

Plainly the worthy skipper was uncomfortable. If it leaked out—Fawcett would never talk about

it, of course; he knew that. And anyway—well, it was his own boat, wasn't it? He gripped the woodsman's hand in quick decision, his eyes glinting with a mixture of sympathy, good-fellowship and daring.

"I'll do it, old man, because it's you; but there isn't another man—"

"Thanks, Tom. And not a word to Martin Hardy, please. What time will you be pulling out?"

Lester calculated rapidly.

"Train's in at seven-ten—How about eight sharp? That's two full hours before schedule—Great Scott! do you know what I've got to do? I've got to send Fraser gallivantin' all over town to notify my passengers! That's what you've let me in for, you son of a gun, and me so damned busy already—So long! I'm off!" He waved an arm and bustled away.

With a sigh of satisfaction Fawcett turned on his heel, still smiling.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE moon was high in the heavens when Inspector O'Malley quietly shut the gate in front of his cottage and turned his back upon it. He paused to fill his great chest with the cold pure air; it was not a breath of exhilaration but rather as if the atmosphere of the room he had just left had been smothering him and it had been necessary for him to get out quickly into the fresh air. In spite of the night chill, his forehead was damp with sweat; for it had been with great difficulty that he had concealed from Steve the fact that he was greatly disturbed.

He glanced back at the lighted window where the young man was still sitting, smoking his pipe, smoking, smoking. Steve would not be able to get to sleep for a while with those thoughts that were troubling him and O'Malley caught his breath again and strode away with an energy that bespoke a definite purpose. He had told Steve that he had a little business to attend to. What he did not tell him was that the business was with the boy's own mother.

He must see Lucy at once. Late and all as it was, he must see her—that very night. The situation would not brook delay; it was too risky.

"G—d, if that boy should learn the truth!" he muttered. "And the Chetwood girl—what does she know? If she should talk to Lucy and Lucy loses her nerve, what then?"

His heart sank with misgiving and unconsciously he quickened his step. His head was bowed and heavy thoughts kept him company as he picked his way towards the Hardy cottage. This dear woman whose life had been so sad and had fitted in so singularly with his own—how he had grown to love her! She must be spared all possible pain; yet the approaching interview would be painful and he dreaded it.

Following Fawcett's departure for the barber-shop O'Malley had taken Steve home with him for the night. The young man was naturally concerned over anything which threatened his old friend of the north woods and in response to his insistence the Inspector had told him what he knew of Fawcett's past. O'Malley had seen Steve pass from incredulity to belief, from growing astonishment to dismay as the tale unfolded until at length he had leaped to his feet in excitement over the discovery—

But how was O'Malley to know that the story he was telling would encroach in any way upon the boy's recent experiences in the North? Steve had poured out in swift words all that had happened in the neighborhood of the little camp, as he knew it—the arrival of the stranger from New

York and its peculiar effect upon Martin Hardy, the chase after Red Lewis and the discovery in the old wallet of an old photograph—What devil's prank was this to so cast out the years between that the Past should thus suddenly overlay the Present with its forgotten menace?

From a man whose face and bearing radiated kindness the Inspector had become a man of blood and iron as he listened with that cold calm which was the result of years of police service. Then, the old photograph—the boy's eager questioning—and O'Malley was fighting to retain his calm, to hide the sickening apprehensions that struck him in a flash of comprehension.

He had managed it somehow. He had quieted Steve temporarily by feigning ignorance; but first thing in the morning the boy would be seeking the truth from his mother. What then? O'Malley hastened his stride. Lucy must be prepared for the shock. He had even managed to borrow that photograph—

He exclaimed aloud as he noted the light still burning in the sitting-room of the Hardy cottage and he had to check himself sharply to approach with a calm which he was far from feeling. In answer to his gentle knock, Mrs. Hardy herself came to the door and he saw the quick apprehension that crowded the surprise from her eyes. She held the door open for him without speaking and he stepped quietly past her and went into the

sitting-room. There he faced her, his eyes searching hers enquiringly.

"You are a late visitor, Michael," she murmured, studying him anxiously. "What has brought you here? What has happened?"

His face was gray and drawn in the lamplight and for a moment he hesitated. With a little catch of her breath, she sank upon the davenport and indicated a seat for him beside her. He took it silently.

"The young ladies?" He raised his eyes to the ceiling.

"They are asleep."

"I—have just had a long talk with Steve. Has he told you of his adventures up north?"

"Not yet. He is coming to see me in the morning."

"That is why I am here, Lucy," he said soberly.

"You mean—? What do you mean, Michael?"

He recounted Steve's experiences briefly and during the recital she made no sound. O'Malley reached into his pocket.

"This is the photograph," he said quietly. "The boy is more than curious about it."

Her hands trembled as she took the little oblong of cardboard, old-fashioned, scalloped, gold-edged. Her chin quivered and her face paled; it was like a mirror for the thoughts that thronged upon her as she gazed.

"Larry! Larry!" came the whispered word as

she reverently raised the little photograph to her lips, her eyes bright with unshed tears.

O'Malley got up and crossed over to the window and back. He was deeply moved. Then he went swiftly towards her; for suddenly she was sobbing as if her heart would break. The photograph of her husband had opened wide the gates of memory, bringing back in vivid retrospect the few happy days of her life—and the long years of grief and shadow. All the walls which she had carefully builded around the tragedy lay crumbled. The men who had wrecked her life were near at hand—had even spoken to her son. He was in love with one of their girls—the daughter of his father's murderer! But no, only his ward. No matter . . . she was close to him . . . probably loved this man as if he were her father.

"Oh, God! will the past forever shadow me?" she cried out.

"Lucy—dear!" The big hearted Irishman was kneeling at her feet, trying in vain to comfort her. "Don't, Lucy. Remember that Steve does not know. He must never know!"

"His girl is here—under this very roof! She has cast a spell upon my boy. . . .!"

"Lucy!" he breathed in reproof, shocked by the sudden grimness which possessed her. "This is not like you! Those girls are innocent at least.

They are entirely blameless and, after all, there was no—”

“Oh, I know what you would say,” she broke in. “You still believe that Martin is innocent; but that is just your kindness of heart. I know I know something has always told me. . . .” Her voice broke.

Very tenderly O'Malley caressed the greying hair on the bowed head. Over and over again he whispered the need for her to be calm. Steve must not learn the truth; she knew what a violent temper he had anything might happen.

“She shall not have him! I must get her away from him! She shall leave this house at once! Think, Michael if he married her and later learned—! Can't you see how impossible it is?” Her voice carried a note of hysterical impatience.

“Perhaps you are right,” he soothed, “but—”

“But what?” she challenged, looking at him determinedly.

“You may find it difficult. You know what young people are. . . . Steve in particular”

“I don't care. It must never happen. Oh, Michael, that this trouble should have come just as we!” She placed her arms about his neck, her white face momentarily flushing.

“Dearest, it can make no difference to us,” he whispered, pressing her to him. “Can it now?” he insisted.

“We will—have to—wait longer”

They remained thus, each fighting for emotional control. They were very much in love, these two old children, and the sudden encroachment of tragedy upon their happiness had shaken them to the depths.

She disengaged herself presently and it was a shock to him to note the physical change that had taken place in her within such a short period. She seemed years older. All her customary sprightliness had gone from her carriage; her figure had slumped, haggard lines showed in her face, hands twitched nervously and only her eyes — they seemed to burn with a consuming fire. From the bottom of his heart he pitied her as he took one of her hands in his own.

"You must not take it like this, Lucy dear," he protested soothingly. "There is something to be said on both sides. There must be. There always is."

"I wish it were so, but I am afraid not—not in this case, Michael. I have become rather indurated through the years and I may be a little too hard. . . . But the worst has come to pass—"

"No," objected O'Malley, determined that she should not be too harsh with young and innocent hearts. "I am going to tell you something that perhaps I have no right to; yet I feel it is my duty under the circumstances.

"There is nothing you can say that will lessen the pain of this new sorrow," she said dully.

"Listen, Lucy: You can not argue that because a beaver undermines a dam to secure material to build his home, thereby releasing waters that inundate the surrounding country, the waters are to blame; nor can you blame the beaver for blindly seeking what he so much desires. Come now, please believe that Steve and the young woman he has chosen as his mate should not suffer for all that has gone before. Say it is an accident rather than a tragedy."

"You are very kind to say that." She looked at him gravely.

"I must tell you that there is one other who will be affected if you insist in breaking up this alliance and that is Dean Fawcett."

"Steve's friend?"

"Yes. His real name is George Chetwood. He is Joyce's father."

She leaned away and looked at him with widened eyes.

"Can that be true?"

"I am almost sure of it, although I have to admit that my evidence is circumstantial. You will remember me telling you once about Martin's exit from Dawson? . . . the incidents following it?"

She nodded.

"You said he called at some miner's shack . . ."

"Yes, about twelve miles out of Dawson, a little claim on the Rocky Creek. Well, that was George Chetwood's place. He was living there with his

wife and baby girl; they had only recently come from somewhere north of here. Things didn't go well with him in Dawson; but he might have made good—if his wife had not run off with another man. You remember the story. . . . ?”

“The usual sordid tale,” murmured the woman sadly.

“Those were rough days,” commented O'Malley. “The man she ran away with soon proved himself unworthy of the sacrifice she had made for him and got tired of looking after her when she was taken sick. Poor creature! She headed blindly back to the only place she had ever been able to call ‘home’ and Chetwood was man enough to take her in. I have always admired him for that.”

“Yes, it was charitable,” she agreed.

“Unfortunately, Chetwood lost his head, did the fool thing—went racing into Dawson after the man—at least, this is how I have it figured out. But he missed his enemy on the trail and did not find him; the trail forked some miles from the Chetwood cabin and while Chetwood was going into Dawson by one route the man he pursued was coming out of Dawson by the other trail. . . . Strange how things happen, Lucy, at times. . . .” O'Malley paused, his thoughts far away down the vista of the Past.

“Yes, he missed the man on the trail. . . .,” she prompted. If the Inspector's object in relating

these details was to take her mind off herself, he had succeeded; she was interested. "What became of the woman and the baby?"

"I am coming to that. In Dawson Chetwood learned that the man he sought had left hurriedly—had married a French girl from the dance-hall and skipped. It took him a while to get to the bottom of the situation, to find out what he wanted to know, then just as he was preparing to go home in bitterness a half-breed arrived with the news that his wife was dead—found, starved to death, in the tiny bedroom—with the door locked—and the key on the outside!"

"Michael!" gasped Mrs. Hardy, horrified. "Why did you not tell me of this before? How do you know all this?"

"I have had to piece it together from what I managed to pick up, long after I investigated the circumstances. I found an Indian woman, for instance, who had been engaged by Chetwood to go and minister to his sick wife while he was away; for some reason the squaw did not go to the Chetwood place at all. She did not tell a soul about it and only when she was on her deathbed did she send for me and confess to her neglect. It was serious enough; for at the time everybody in Dawson blamed Chetwood. Knowing his story, they thought he had locked the door on his wife and left her there to die—She was too weak to escape and the cabin was off the trail in a lone-

some spot. To make matters worse, Chetwood suddenly disappeared over night. . . .” Again O’Malley paused, his gaze far away.

“What became of the baby?” she asked, breathed.

“That has always puzzled me, Lucy—until to-night.”

“Until to-night? What do you mean?”

“Chetwood did not return to his cabin. The baby was not there and he would have had great difficulty in escaping with an infant on his hands. . . . No, he did not take the baby with him—”

She clutched his arm, her eyes dilated with a sudden thought.

“Michael,—Martin—you say he called at that cabin—Do you think that he—?”

“No, he had nothing to do with the locking of that door. I found proof to the contrary. He stopped at the place before that happened—before the woman came back to Chetwood. Chetwood had been very ill himself and I believe that Martin found him there alone—too sick to look after the little one. I believe now that it was Martin who took the baby away.”

Mechanically her eyes were lifted to the ceiling and he slowly nodded his head.

“The baby had been named. Her name was Joyce. Fawcett—poor devil! He recognized me yesterday and is afraid. He has lived a lonely, miserable life in the northern wilderness among

the Indians for fifteen years and now he thinks this is the end. I must tell him to-morrow. It has all been a terrible mistake. Somehow I cannot get out of the notion that he has recognized the young woman upstairs as his daughter."

"Oh, Michael, I—don't know what to do." She bowed her head on his shoulder. "You are always so fair and just—Please advise me what is best."

O'Malley's eyes brightened as he stroked her head. He had won.

"For the present, Lucy, you must keep quiet. Resent any curious questions from Steve until I arrive at some definite plan of action. Perhaps after I have spoken to Fawcett, it will help. Something tells me that he knows more than we do. To-morrow I will come again—after I have talked with Fawcett. Everything will be all right yet, dear Lucy."

Reverently he kissed her. At the door he kissed her again—and was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

WEARY in body and spirit. Mrs. Hardy returned to the sitting-room; but her eyes were wide with wakefulness. The hour was late, she knew, and she could not remain up all night. She was in the act of reaching for the lamp when the creak of the stair treads came to her with startling loudness in the quiet of the night. She stood up and took a step forward when suddenly there appeared in the doorway a slim, girlish figure, wrapped in a kimona.

It was Joyce Chetwood. She came quickly into the room, then paused uncertainly, gazing long and intently at the older woman with eyes which were eloquent of a troubled mind. In spite of the fact that she looked upon this young girl as an interloper, Mrs. Hardy experienced an unexpected thrill of sympathy for her.

"You look as if something were troubling you," she said simply. "You wish to speak to me? Won't you sit down, then—over here. What is the matter?"

Joyce's face was colorless and she looked rather startled and—frail.

"That is what I have come down to find out, Mrs. Hardy. It is you who are in trouble. I

thought I heard voices—that you were sobbing. Was I dreaming? Is there anything I can do? You are not ill?”

“Ill? No, child, not—the way you mean—” She paused, rather nonplussed for words.

“But there is something wrong, I know. You are not happy? Please do not think me presumptuous, dear Mrs. Hardy; but it would be such a pleasure if I could be of service in any way. . . .” She looked at her wistfully.

“There is nothing you can do—I thank you. I was just—going to bed,” she said haltingly. She smiled; but there was a tinge of bitterness in it that did not escape the young girl. Her face grew still whiter in sudden intuition.

“You do not altogether approve—of me?” she asked with painful frankness. “Please—I am not a child.”

Mrs. Hardy shrank unconsciously. For a moment she struggled to overcome the welling emotion which the words aroused. Why did the girl persist so? Why couldn’t she have stayed in her bed. . . .?

“You are in love with my boy,” she stated heavily.

“Yes, oh yes!” cried the girl breathlessly. “I am. It means everything to me, but I am afraid it cannot go on”

Mrs. Hardy suddenly took her hands and drew her to a seat upon the davenport.

"You must be fair with me, Miss Chetwood. Your words are very strange. Remember, I am Steve's mother. Why do you say that? You mean this infatuation—?"

"Ah, but it is not that, Mrs. Hardy,—infatuation. I—am trying to decide what is best—for Steve."

"Yes?" cried the mother eagerly. "What is the trouble?"

"Yes, you are right—in guessing that I am in trouble, Mrs. Hardy. But it is something in which Steve has no part unless—unless he may be considered as a loss . . . my loss."

"You speak very strangely," said Mrs. Hardy, aware of the tragic look in the girl's eyes. "Do you want to tell me—what is the matter?"

"I feel that I must tell someone. I would rather tell you because—you are Steve's mother. You may understand and perhaps advise what is best."

The older woman withdrew her hands and caught her breath sharply. Words so like those she had just used to Michael! And here was the girl herself—Dean Fawcett's daughter, Martin Hardy's ward—coming to *her* for advice—! She listened in a daze to the swift recital of what had happened at the Hardy camp during the past weeks—the threats of Jean Dureau and Joyce's fear for her guardian's welfare. She realized with sinking heart that while the girl did not ap-

pear to believe Dureau's story about Martin Hardy, she was prepared to bow to his wishes for the sake of protecting her guardian.

She thought rapidly as she listened. Her mind was a chaos of doubts. Would the harm stop there? Was it not imperative that this young girl be told the truth? Was it right that she should go on, deceived, making sacrifice for such a man? Unless Joyce Chetwood was made to understand—anything might happen. O'Malley was right; it would be hard to keep the young people apart.

The thought of it hardened her heart. She sat stiffly upright. She could not deceive herself nor could her tortured spirit be stilled. Beneath her apparent calm surged the turmoil which had been started sixteen years ago or more when Martin Hardy had been accused of killing her husband—deliberately. By sober strength of will had she kept it down; but now she felt her control slipping. O'Malley had warned her of the danger, but if tragedy were precipitated she would take the responsibility. Tragedy had been her portion and surely some revenge was due her. If she had suffered, why not others? It might mitigate

She stood up unsteadily and walked the length of the room while Joyce regarded her agitation with wonder. She stood at last with only the table between them.

"What would you say if I told you that Dureau did not lie to you, that his story was true?" Her

throat was dry. She stated it bluntly and there was a rasping in her voice and her face grew harsh and bitter. It was as if she sought revenge, not for herself, but for her husband.

Joyce stared at her in mute amazement and for the moment the full significance of the words did not penetrate. Then she flinched as if she had been struck; she seemed to shrink where she sat immovable, dazed. The shock was paralyzing.

"I—do not—understand," she faltered in a weak voice.

"I would have been strong enough to keep my secret if you had not loved my boy!" cried Mrs. Hardy wildly, wringing her hands in nervousness, regardless of the pain she was inflicting. "Even if you had not come here—if you had stayed in your bed—even if you had not said what you did. Do you hear me?"

"If I had not loved Steve!" she repeated inanely. She raised her hands in appeal, a thousand disbeliefs and unspoken questions crowding for expression. The situation had to be met. "What has my love for Steve to do with it?"

"Look at me!" the older woman commanded. "I will tell you. It is your right to know. Fifteen years ago this man who has become your guardian—this Martin Hardy, killed his brother, Lawrence Hardy, at Dawson City in the Yukon. Lawrence Hardy was my husband, Steve's father! Now do you understand why this affair is impossible?"

"Oh! Oh!" The girl had stood up spasmodically, her hands half raised as if to ward off a blow, transfixed. Her lips moved but no sound issued from them.

"Yes, it is true!" cried Mrs. Hardy, reading the movement of the lips.

There followed a long silence and at last the expression on that youthful face, now white as death, frightened the woman who had caused it. A curious pang of guilt seized her. It flashed upon her that this child—she was not much more than a child—had had no mother, no father. No matter that she spoke the truth! There were other considerations than the truth, she realized. She saw the girl sink back into her seat with a moan—and Mrs. Hardy stood aghast now in sudden contrition.

"What have I done? What have I done?" she muttered as she looked down at the bowed head with its shining braids and listened to the convulsive sobbing with fear in her heart. She waited silently until the girl looked up. Then she spoke in low tones:

"My dear child, I am sorry to have caused you this suffering. Forgive me; for I, too, have suffered. . . ." She knelt and lowered her head into the girl's lap, overcome by her sorrow.

Joyce's hands caressed the gray hair, straight over the bowed shoulders and exerted a gentle upward pressure. They looked into each other's

brimming eyes and in a moment their arms were about one another in mutual understanding.

"I think I will go to bed now," Joyce said gently at last. "Please, dear Mrs. Hardy, don't worry any more. I don't think—I shall remain here or see Steve again. It is best—that I go away."

She smiled bravely and with a parting kiss, moved slowly from the room, her hands hanging listlessly at her sides.

Unable to speak for the choking pain in her throat, Mrs. Hardy watched her go. The thought of Joyce thus putting aside her love without question brought her feelings to a climax and there was infinite tragedy, infinite tenderness in the eyes which followed the slim figure from the room.

CHAPTER XX

THE river, blanketed with heavy white mists, flowed on past the steamer *Nipwam* with a force which made the little vessel tug at her moorings. Only the faint puffing of a little jet of escaping steam in her side broke the bleak stillness of early morning. But a little while before under the red flare of torches men had swarmed on the deck; but with the huge scow loaded, the lights had been extinguished and the men had gone to their bunks to snatch a few hours rest. Away to the north ranked the masses of pine and spruce, the first thin rays of sunlight here and there penetrating the shadows.

It was six-thirty. A cabin on the upper deck opened and Captain Thomas Lester stepped out, hoarsely proclaiming the hour to the occupant of a cabin nearby. Yawning prodigiously, he made his way forward and clambored down the companionway to the main deck—then stood and stared.

Down the board walk two girls were approaching, the younger occasionally blowing upon her fingers which were stinging with the cold. With jaw agape the skipper watched them gingerly cross the gangplank to the deck, the while he

tried to make up his mind what to say. Something had slipped, he thought. Such a move as this could not have occurred to Fawcett.

"Good morning, Captain," greeted Joyce. "You are surprised to see us so early."

"Mornin' Miss—er—I aint denyin' it."

"We thought it would be better to get aboard before the crowd. We would like to go to our cabin and stay there until we are well away. Then we plan to come out and completely surprise daddy. So don't you go telling him we're here, please. Will you show us which cabin is to be ours?"

With a gesture of helplessness Captain Lester complied. Then he went off, filling his pipe with thoughtful deliberation. More mystery! The Devil on one side and the Deep Sea on the other! What was Fawcett going to say now? Would he expect to be advised of this new turn in affairs? If the girls didn't want their guardian to know they were aboard until it was too late to turn back, they would hardly want Fawcett to know. Fawcett could go to the devil, he decided.

An hour later Captain Lester saw Martin Hardy approaching and he experienced an uncomfortable feeling of sneakishness which was entirely foreign to him. He began to hate even his own company. His responsibility, which had seemed heavy enough ever since he had made that fool promise to Fawcett, now seemed triple-

plated. Abruptly he swung forward, making a great fuss of superintending the spreading of sailcloth over the barge's load and leaving Hardy to the Purser.

The result of Fraser's visit to hotels and rooming-houses the evening before was becoming apparent in the arrival of the passengers. Men were coming in two's and three's, presently in larger groups, all eager to get away—to see and feel this new land which they hoped would make them rich.

By eight o'clock the last pack had been stowed away. Clamboring up to his diminutive bridge, Captain Lester rang the bell in the engine-room and in response the *Nipwam* came round while the unwieldy bulk of the barge creaked and groaned under the strain. Clear of the dock, the skipper tooted the whistle once and grinned as he glanced at his watch. He had kept his bargain with Fawcett to the minute; his boat had pulled out two hours earlier than usual!

The two girls kept to their cabin, as they had planned. Joyce had fallen into a troubled sleep and Dorothy had not the heart to waken her, she looked so pale and worn this morning. Dorothy was about the most mystified girl in the world as she watched the sleeper turn and toss in the bunk. The breakfast which the good-hearted captain had smuggled to them had not tempted Joyce's appetite and Dorothy could not but wonder if her

foster sister was on the verge of an illness. The things that were happening were so strange. To be wakened at daybreak and told that they must go stealthily out of Mrs. Hardy's house to the boat—that they were going back to the camp—The very idea of it had frightened Dorothy and Joyce had been forced to tell her that her father would be going back with them. Why must Joyce be so secretive about it all? Why had she made her promise faithfully not to even look out of the cabin until she gave the word?

It was too much for Dorothy to fathom. She wondered now if her father really was a passenger and was sorely tempted to break her promise and go out to see for herself. But she loved Joyce and as she gazed fondly at the tired lines in the other's face she overcame her temptation.

At the first indication that Joyce was awakening, however, she pounced upon her for a decision.

"We will go and hunt daddy up now, dear?" she asked anxiously. "We are miles down the river now."

Joyce sat on the edge of the bunk, a pathetic figure. Sheer physical lassitude weighed her limbs and Dorothy looked at her keenly, noting the circles that ringed the big brown eyes.

"Are you all right, Joyce? Shall I get you

something to eat? You haven't had a bite since last night!"

Joyce shook her head. Instead she had a good wash, afterwards combing and brushing the long strands of her hair.

"Will I do?" she asked, smiling with some of her old spirit, and Dorothy sprang up and embraced her.

"Of course you will. Hurry, Joyce! I'm so anxious to see daddy I can't wait. *Won't* he be surprised?"

Long shafts of sunlight came filtering through the curtains of the little window, flecking the interior with a moving kaleidoscope of gold and grey. As they passed outside into the crisp northern air, Joyce glanced at her watch; it was after ten o'clock. A light breeze, sweeping across the river, caught at their skirts and brought color to their cheeks.

Joyce brushed stray wisps of hair from her eyes and looked about her. Captain Lester had allotted them a cabin on the upper deck where they could enjoy comparative privacy. From the crowded deck below and from the smoking-room arose a vast murmur of men's voices, eager, questioning, almost drowning out the monotonous throbbing of the engines. Dorothy drew back from the rail in dismay.

"We can't go hunting him down in that crowd,

Joyce. Let us get hold of the captain—Oh, there he is! Look!”

She broke away, running towards the ladder that led up to the bridge upon which Martin Hardy stood, talking to Lester. She called to him and with a shout of surprise he leaned over the rail and stared down at them. His surprise amounted almost to dismay.

“What in the world are you doing here?” he cried. Then he was overwhelmed in an avalanche of girlish arms, hair, kisses, laughter and—tears! “What’s this? What’s this? Joyce!”

“We just thought we would go back with you,” Joyce explained with some diffidence. She saw that Captain Lester pretended to be very busy, peering ahead down the river.

“Go back with me? But how came you here?” There was a hint of anxiety in his voice. “Why are you not at the camp?”

“We had to come away! We had a terrible time!” Dorothy cried, clinging to him. Only Joyce’s quick look of reproof prevented her from saying more.

Martin Hardy glanced quickly across at Joyce who stood leaning over the rail, watching the dark-timbered shore with unseeing eyes. Dorothy, gulping down the lump in her throat, turned to her father with moist eyes. She told him of their trip down the river, how they had heard that he was returning by this boat and planned to meet

him. She tried to make it plain that they had not been disobedient but that they had reasons of their own for wanting to leave the camp and go to meet him.

Hardy listened in surprise and anxiety. He saw that Joyce was avoiding his eyes, had not yet offered any explanation—Joyce who was usually the leader in any girlish escapade. . . .

“Well, well!” he murmured. “You’re a sight for sore eyes and no mistake, Dot.” He tried to hide his concern in lightness of tone. “We’ll talk about it later. Here’s a fat letter from your mother. Take it along to your cabin, child, and read it.”

Dorothy went obediently with a backward glance at Joyce. She guessed that Joyce intended to tell him—everything. With her going Joyce felt suddenly perturbed, but she followed her guardian to his cabin without a word. She felt that she would live over and over again the interview which was about to take place; but it could not be avoided.

It was not that her pride was crushed; the wound was deeper than that. She knew that it would be hard to give this man her unbounded friendship and love; even though nothing had been proved against him, things could never be the same, she thought. She did not want to set herself up in judgment; yet there were certain facts—a chain of evidence that was almost damning.

Always she had invested him with a glamor, born of her youth and gratitude and confidence in him, and it hurt to find it becoming clouded. Her trust in him was almost crushed and doubts darkened her whole perspective until his character became a thing to stand stripped and naked.

Hardy, stealing looks at her, read the pain in her face and was moved to despair. He placed his arm about her gently, but refrained from conversation until they were alone in the little cabin.

"There has been some trouble, Joyce. Tell me—everything, please."

So she told him in a low colorless voice—of Mauger's overtures and her rescue by Steve; of Fawcett and Dureau's arrival at the camp and their experience with Red Lewis; of Fawcett taking them away. But not a word as to the cause of it all—the menacing threat of Dureau or of what had passed between herself and Mrs. Hardy. As she finished the tale, she looked full in his face and what she saw made her afraid. He was deadly pale and perspiration stood in little beads upon his brow. The truth, the inexorable truth was there!

"Are you telling me everything?" he asked in a voice unlike his own.

The question quickened her pulse; but either because she felt weak from her experiences or because, still loving him, she thought he needed sympathy, she half capitulated.

"I—want to sell the claim—to Mr. Dureau," she said, looking at him quickly.

"Why?" he demanded. He seemed stupified for the moment. "Why?" he repeated. The little word probed at her and would not be denied.

"I don't want it any more. . . . There seems to be something wrong with it—Oh, I don't know!" she cried miserably. "I just want to go far away where we can be—can be—happy—as we used to be—" Her voice caught in a sob and the eyes which she raised to him were filled with tears.

He leaned forward and caught her two hands.

"My poor little girl!" he murmured gently. "You are worn out. Of course, if you look at it that way, Dureau can have it. I—will consent to anything if it will bring happiness to you, Joyce. For after all, what is life without happiness—happiness, love? Without these it is not worth the living. Not worth the living!" His voice was hoarse with deep emotion.

"And yet," he went on; "I cannot believe it fully. Our trips up here have been so pleasant—and the thought that it made you happy to be on your dear father's place"

"Please!" she protested. "Don't remind me of that! If you will just do what I ask—without question. . . . I think I will go now and join Dorothy if I may."

She left him. He heard the door close softly behind her and he was alone. She had gone—without kissing him! The sight of his face in the tiny mirror shocked him; it was haggard, colorless. So! this was the end.

Hands clenched at his side he sat silent for a full minute, revolving all that she had said. There was no doubt of it now; Dureau had made up his mind to blackmail him! By some means he had found out that the claim belonged to Joyce and had played upon her affection to jump the claim.

“How much has he told her? How much?” he whispered fiercely.

He wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. Everything, probably! Joyce’s manner—the slow, careful way in which she had told her story—came back to him. She knew, but was trying to keep the fact from him!

Passionate anger seized him. He had never pictured a situation such as this. The whole of the happy structure he had tried to erect about their lives was in ruins now. Was Fate going to trick him again?—as it had in the past? Did Joyce believe or disbelieve what she had heard?

Then the physical courage that was his arose to quiet him, to calm his soul. The inevitable had happened perhaps and there could be no turning back. Well, so be it. He was not a coward. He would see it through.

And when he arrived at the camp—!

He stood up, tall, grim. If only the girls were not with him! Perhaps he could find an excuse to leave them behind—at the Landing, with Mrs. Hayley. Yes, that would be best. That was what he would do.

CHAPTER XXI

STEVE took his time about getting up. O'Malley had breakfasted and was away before the young man rolled lazily out of the covers and busied himself with his shaving things. He had not rested as well as usual; he missed the little tent to which he was accustomed, the quiet of the Open, broken only by the harmonies of sound which Nature provided—bird song, running water, the wind in the forest, rustlings in the undergrowth. His mental disturbance, too, had been such that his slumber had not been unbroken.

The health of Youth, however, was not to be denied and he even droned a tune in his rich bass as he applied the lather to his lean tanned face. For the moment he had forgotten everything but the fact that he was due at his mother's for breakfast at eight-thirty and that afterwards he had promised to show the two guests about the town. He felt romantically happy. It was great to have Joyce with his mother like this; he hoped they would become well acquainted during the visit. His mother could not help loving her. Who could?

"Nobody!" he laughed aloud. "And that means you, you son-of-a-gun!" he apostrophied

his image in the glass. "She's worth a dozen like you! She's—"

He paused to glance out the window, listening. Was that the *Nipwam's* whistle? She wasn't due to pull out for a couple of hours yet. He went into the other room and glanced at the clock. He'd need to hurry or he'd be late. Another glance at the wide vista of river, sprayed by a wintry sun, and he speeded up his ablutions.

Half an hour later he swung open the lattice gate, stopped to pick a sprig of Sweet William for his button-hole, then went gaily up the flower-bordered path. Subconsciously his mind recorded a curious silence about the place.

"Oh, mother!" he called briskly, throwing his hat on the table in the hall.

There was no answering call; but presently he heard her upstairs. She came down slowly, pausing at the stair landing to gaze down upon him in troubled silence.

"Good morning, mother!" He sprang up the steps and kissed her, escorting her down to the hall with mock ceremony. "Where's Joyce and Dorothy?"

"They are gone."

"Why, is breakfast over?" he asked in dismay. "O'Malley's clock—" But she was shaking her head. "Where have they gone to?"

"I—don't know, Steve," said his mother. "They've just—gone."

"For a breath of air I guess," he supplied. "Gee, mother, anybody that's lived out under the sky—!" He stopped abruptly, aware suddenly of something in his mother's manner. The animation fled from his face. He stared at her in quick concern. "You are not feeling very spry this morning? Is it one of those old headaches again? You look all in."

She gazed at him solemnly from hollow eyes.

"Steve, I do not know when the girls will be back," she announced in flat tones. "I do not know whether they will be back at all."

There was a painful silence. Mrs. Hardy watched the look of incredulous concern in his face. She crossed over and sat down near him. Then with mask-like face, she spoke.

"I have seen neither of the young ladies this morning. I did not hear them go out; but it must have been very early. When I went to call them I got no answer and when I looked into the room they were gone. They had made the beds before they went and tidied everything up—"

"Suitcases?"

"They took their hand luggage with them."

Again that painful silence. She fingered her apron nervously.

"I talked to Miss Chetwood last night, Steve. She wanted to talk to me, she said. She told me—many things—that were troubling her. The confidences of a girl—in love—and some other

things—things that I thought had been buried and forgotten”

“Buried and forgotten!” he muttered. His face, which had blushed brick red, paled perceptibly. Her manner intrigued him and the things he had planned to ask her now came crowding upon him in confusion. Her words startled him with their portent.

“These other things—what were they, mother?” he found himself asking, marvelling that he could speak in such calm, matter-of-fact tones. She did not answer for the moment. “Were they in connection with me in any way—with my father?” he hazarded, his expression alive with interest.

“Yes,” she breathed at length, watching him anxiously.

“Well? Go ahead, mother. Tell me about it—No, wait.” He searched his pockets for the photograph which he had taken from the body of Red Lewis, until he remembered that he had given it to O’Malley. “I had a photo of a man—I got it from Red Lewis, that outlaw I went after—I wanted to show it to you; but I turned it over to the Inspector last night—”

“I have seen it,” she interjected.

Instantly Steve divined how that had come about.

“O’Malley came her to see you late last night? So that was where he was going, eh? And was that a photograph of my father. At her nod his

voice rose with excitement. "That's a very strange thing, mother—me finding it like that on the dead body of a criminal who had stolen it from Martin Hardy—" He paused at her startled look, his thoughts going off at a tangent. "Martin Hardy—Say, now, what was he doing with it? Is he my uncle?"

Again she nodded. She could not trust herself to speak just then. A curious hard light came into her eyes and, noting it, he wondered at it. He got up, muttering, and began to pace the room, trying to think clearly. Back to vision came that first meeting at the Landing—Mrs. Hayley's boarding-house—the look that had puzzled him at the time.

"My poor boy!" murmured his mother. She had not intended him to hear her; but he did. He rounded upon her suddenly.

"Why do you say that?" he demanded. "You say it as if I were to be pitied in some way. Why?" He saw that his mother was strangely moved and he stepped over and took her hand. "Look here now, mother, I want to have this thing cleaned up immediately. You are holding something back from me. You have been doing it all these years and I want to know why you have not told me about Martin Hardy long ago. I found letters—from Aunt Ada—in the wallet along with the photograph. It is my right to know all about my father's people, isn't it? Why have I not been told? I must insist on knowing."

He steeled his heart against the look of appeal with which she sought to avoid the situation and she saw that he was adamant and would not be denied the information he felt was his right. With a helpless gesture she began to talk—family history, some of which he already knew, some that he did not.

“You have not told me anything to explain why you have never talked to me about Martin Hardy—why he has never come to visit us,” he commented when she paused. “I want to know, mother. I hardly expected you to act this way—making me drag it out of you bit by bit like this. In heaven’s name, why? What else did Joyce tell you last night?” he demanded suddenly as a new thought struck him. “Answer me, mother please!”

She looked away from him miserably. In her heart she knew that there was danger in telling him more and she hesitated. Yet he was her boy, her own flesh and blood, and temptation tugged at her; he would understand; he at least loved her.

“Up there—where you have just come from—some men are trying to get possession of the property which Miss Chetwood owns,” she began timidly. “They are unscrupulous—”

“I know that!” grated Steve. “Go on. What else?”

“One of them threatened—”

"Threatened? A case of blackmail?" Steve spoke quickly, his eyes glinting. "Is that it, mother? These men know something that enables them to dare to force things that way?"

"Yes," she admitted in a weak voice. "Steve, if you do not keep cool I will not—I cannot go on. . . . Can't you see that?"

"Cool?" He laughed shortly. "What is it that they know? Nothing against Joyce, of course. Ah, I see—Martin Hardy is her guardian. He's the one they're after. That right?"

"This man, Dureau,—he was in the Klondyke years ago when your father and your uncle, were there. He has threatened to stir up past incidents—"

She buried her face in her hands; but he caught her shoulders and made her look at him.

"The truth, mother!" he urged.

"Your father was killed, Steve; but not by a snowslide," she said in a hollow voice. "He was shot! Your uncle was accused of the crime."

His hands fell away from her shoulders. He stood back and looked at her with widened eyes.

"But that—was merely Dureau's story?" he gasped. "You don't mean that it's true?"

"It is true," she murmured, afraid to look at him.

He stared at her.

"Martin Hardy — my God!" he whispered hoarsely. "But you did not tell her that?—Joyce?"

—You surely did not tell her—Ah, but you *did*? I can see by your face you *did*!” he accused wildly.

“Steve! How could I help it? All these years I have suffered! Can you not see how this has made me suffer? And the thought that my boy should have anything to do with anybody so near to Martin Hardy—I said things that—perhaps—under ordinary circumstances—I would not have said,” she panted.

She grew afraid of his silence, the expression on his face.

“Steve! Steve!” She seized his hand. “Don’t you understand what it has been—all these years? Ah, my dear boy!—the long shadow, outflung! But the edge of it—the edge of it is near now—”

He was paying no attention to her. Erect and silent he stood, thoughts concentrating. When he began to visualize the scene which must have been enacted in this room the night before, the full import of it all came near to unnerving him. The thought of that dear girl learning these terrible truths about her guardian, the man she loved as a father—He brought his accusing gaze to bear upon his mother.

“Do you understand what you have done!—the misery you have caused an innocent girl? Do you realize what you have done to me? Look at me!” he cried out querulously. He did not recognize her as his mother in that moment; she

was merely the woman who had shattered their happiness and his voice throbbed with suppressed anger.

"Do you know where she went?" Then without waiting for response: "And how did Martin Hardy get away from that crowd at Dawson if he was guilty?" Even now his police training crept in.

"Michael was there—!" She stopped short, conscious that she had said too much.

"O'Malley!" cried Steve. "He knows about it, eh. Good! Then he shall tell me the story as it should be told—what I should have known years ago. Do you hear? You have all treated me like a baby and now—I'll show you!" He pushed her from him roughly and started for the door.

"Steve!" she implored. "If I have made a mistake, forgive me!" Her voice broke.

"You are a fine one to ask forgiveness for what you have tried to do!" he cried scornfully. "But in spite of you, I will find her. It is the only thing that matters in this whole world!"

"Steve!" she called after him.

But he was gone. The silence of the room seemed to mock her. In the face of O'Malley's advice she had dared to interfere in these two lives which should have been permitted to find their own expression. She had dared to pit her judgment of her son and her own life story

against Nature and she realized, too late, that she had made a grievous mistake.

Steve got as far as the gate. There he paused and his face lost some of its sternness. The panorama of events as they fled in swift review through his mind assumed the proportions of a tragic drama. His mother had indeed suffered—his mother—and he had been unkind to her—!

He turned on his heel and ran back into the house. The sight of her standing just as he had left her moved him to the depths. Ah, the hopeless sadness of her!

“Mother! Forgive me, dear mother!” he said brokenly.

Strangely calm and radiant, she lifted her tear-wet face. He put his strong arms about her and held her in a tight embrace.

CHAPTER XXII

SIT down, Fawcett. I'll be through in a moment."

Inspector O'Malley carefully sealed the flap of the envelope, addressed it and handed it to the waiting orderly with an additional verbal commission that would keep him away from the post for most of the forenoon. The Inspector waited until the door had closed, then pivoted in his chair to face the most difficult interview for many a long day.

"You are earlier than I expected, Fawcett; but it is all right. The early bird—and all that sort of thing, eh? You look a different man this morning, if I may say so. Don't wonder at your anxiety to get to the barber."

They faced each other squarely; but if O'Malley was hoping to surprise a change of expression he was forced to admit defeat.

"Yes, a shave does make a big difference in a man's looks; in his whole outlook on life, in fact," agreed the caller readily.

"You play a good game of poker, Fawcett," smiled the Inspector, the other's insouciance striking a spark of respect from him. He reached

into a drawer and pulled out a box of cigars. "Will you smoke?"

"Thanks." He took a cigar, touched a match to the end of it, and waited.

O'Malley swung around in his desk chair to look out the window, for a moment smoking in silent thought. When he spoke it was in a low, reminiscent tone:

"You remind me very much of a man I met in the Klondyke. I can't get the thing out of my head."

"You intimated as much last night."

"It was in '98, I think," continued O'Malley with a shrug of his broad shoulders, "during the stampede. I was stationed at Dawson. There was a man killed—murdered; but that was nothing unusual up there at that time. Only this one—well, it wasn't a Soapy Smith stunt nor an ambush affair; it was different. The murdered man's name was Lawrence Hardy and his brother was accused of the crime."

"You are not suggesting—?"

The big Irishman turned and eyed Fawcett oddly, then shook his head slowly.

"No. No, you do not remind me of Lawrence Hardy nor his brother Martin, the suspected man. Strictly speaking, the Hardy case has nothing to do with the man I have in mind. I only mention it because when Martin Hardy was making his getaway he called at a lonely cabin—"

He paused deliberately to relight his cigar, which was burning unevenly, and the silence of the room was broken only by his steady puffing. Fawcett felt himself growing cold at the thought that he was in for a merciless police grilling; but he had himself well under control and his face betrayed nothing.

"He called at a lonely cabin," repeated the Inspector. "A man named Chetwood lived there—George Chetwood. He had a wife and one child, a baby girl. Something happened in that cabin—hard to say just what; but word reached Dawson that Mrs. Chetwood had been found dead in bed. No sign of Chetwood or the baby."

Again he paused, leaning forward to use the ash-tray and stealing a look at his auditor's face. It was like a dead mask, except for the cold glitter of the eyes.

"The woman had been very ill and was too weak to escape. The door of the room in which she lay was found locked—on the outside! The story got out and the boys judged Chetwood guilty. . . ."

"Why?" rasped Fawcett.

"Chetwood's story was common property in Dawson. His wife had left him the previous winter—to live with—elsewhere. When she was taken sick the man she had gone to got tired of looking after her. . . . She went back to Chetwood at the lonely cabin and he—took her in and cared

for her. I found that out afterwards; but at the time the boys figured it was Chetwood who had locked the door on her and that he had gone away and left her to die. They would have tried to lynch him if they had laid hands on him."

"He got away, then?"

"Yes, he got away," said O'Malley slowly and as he realized how completely the other was at his mercy, a quick sympathy softened his blue eyes. Justice was a fine thing, but this man had meted out justice to himself. All men were entitled to happiness, to life and freedom. . . . He looked out the window, but saw nothing of the view without; only things of long ago.

"It's been a mystery about the little girl. I cannot believe that Chetwood took her; for he would not have had time. I have always thought that Martin Hardy took the child—kidnapped her, perhaps. According to what I found—her name was Joyce."

"You investigated the case, Inspector?" asked Fawcett somewhat hastily.

"I did. Incidentally I found out that Martin Hardy had not been the only one to call at the Chetwood cabin. The man who had broken up the home actually had the nerve to stop there on his way out of Dawson. Not only that, but he was accompanied by another woman whom he had just married—a dance-hall beauty. This pair came along—it must have been some time after Hardy

called—and I know now for sure that Martin Hardy carried off the child”

“Why do you tell me all this?” interrupted Fawcett huskily.

“Because you remind me so much of George Chetwood,” said O’Malley directly. “Do you understand me?”

“It is strange why you should think so,” he managed. “You seem to have remembered these things very clearly—for such a long time ago.”

He hesitated to say more; the success of his plans forbade it. Yet he wanted to tell him—to have it over with. The restraint of his feelings had been the habit of years; but he controlled the impulse only by the sharpest exercise of will-power.

The big Irishman leaned over and laid a hand on the other’s knee, watching his face.

“I have always felt sorry for Chetwood,” he said kindly. “He was a real man. He had no occasion to run away—to bury himself from his kind all these years, as he has done.”

“What—what do you mean by that?” Fawcett clutched his arm tightly while he looked straight into the Inspector’s eyes, drinking of their sympathy, his mask forgotten.

“I will tell you. That is why I have had you come here.” He reached for a file on the desk and extracted a thin slip of paper, yellow with

age. "I found that by the bedside of the dead woman," he said as he handed it over.

Fawcett's hand trembled as he took it. He did not look immediately at the writing scrawled upon that faded slip. He knew from O'Malley's manner that it was important and summoned his self-control for this supreme test. He must read it calmly. No matter what it contained he must not forget that the purpose to which he had committed himself—all his plans—were at stake. He bent his gaze out the window for a moment to the broad fields, turning sere with the blight of coming winter; beyond, the mighty Saskatchewan sparkled in the sun, small boats moving up and down the river.

To what purpose was it that men came and went, worked and played? For some purpose surely. But unless their course was defined, mapped out—unless their goal was predestined, where could be the substance or dignity in their goings and comings? His own belief in this brought him courage. He at least had come to a point in his fateful path which would permit of no wavering. He would show O'Malley that he had confidence; that he was game.

He raised the paper to read what was written there, wondering at the Inspector's silence and patience. He read the words again. They were simple enough: "Dureau did this. They were afraid of what I would tell about"

The message ended there, incomplete, as if a spasm of pain, weakness, death had prevented the writer from finishing it. Slowly the full meaning of it reached his comprehension and he sank back in his chair, deadly quiet.

O'Malley was at his elbow, his face aglow. In his eyes was a suspicion of moisture. It was a big moment for him, one he had dreamed of. He stretched out a hand for the precious paper and Fawcett relinquished it mechanically.

"This means, Chetwood, that from the time this note was written you have made a terrible mistake."

No response came from the other and O'Malley, strong in his determination to straighten out this man's life, seized his right hand and placed his own left on his shoulder. The thought of what he was doing instilled into the Inspector's face something fine that softened its stern lines.

"You act as though this news frightened you," he said softly.

"It does!" Fawcett whispered. "Because I feel now that I—can't trust myself. G—d! what I have suffered—and all so foolishly!"

"Of course you can trust yourself!" assured O'Malley, but he avoided the other's eyes.

"I did not think that you would know me, O'Malley. I was a fool to come here to Le Pas—but there was a woman involved and when I found what was going on—up north—I felt responsible.

She is the only woman I have had in my heart all these years—my daughter. I have always felt that some day she would need me and now—I can hardly be held responsible for what might happen. I—am afraid and you must help me”

“Gladly.”

“To think of it! Just to think of it!” repeated Fawcett passionately. He got up and commenced to pace the room, hands clenched at his sides. “You have heard stories of men who have lost their reason by being accidentally locked in a safe or a vault over night. Think what it has been to me to live with the shadows of the dead for twenty years! Now, as I look back, I wonder how I have kept it up and remained sane. I am not sure that I am sane. Do you hear that, O’Malley?—Not sure!”

He leaned across the desk and gazed at the Inspector with eyes that glittered dangerously.

“Knowing the whole story, you will not be surprised when I say that I am going north—to get that man!”

O’Malley was startled at the turn the interview was taking. He had it on the tip of his tongue to tell Fawcett that he would arrest him first; that with the Royal Mounted the law came first; that criminals must be brought to justice in a legitimate manner and that he would see to it personally that in this case justice was done; that poetic justice was something the Police would not hear

of, the mere suggestion treason. But he thought better of it and took another tack.

"Have you forgotten the little girl you went to such pains to bring down here?" he asked quietly, smiling at the instant effect of his words. "She has a right to be considered, has she not?"

"My respect for your law is nothing to be compared with my love for my little girl," admitted Fawcett brokenly. "You are right, O'Malley. She must have no more trouble." He bowed his head as he sank back into his chair and covered his eyes with his hand. So he sat while the Inspector waited patiently for him to recover himself.

"If you'll tell me what happened up there," he suggested, "I might be able to help more intelligently."

Fawcett thought rapidly. He still hoped that his original plan would succeed. True, what he had just learned had changed the whole perspective; but the part to be played by Hardy and Dureau in regard to the claim remained the same. The affair was not of his making; only one that he intended to straighten out, if O'Malley would let him.

"Strange the way things come out sometimes," mused the Inspector after Fawcett had run over the events that had developed at the little northern camp. "This Frenchman, officially dead according to our records, showing up like this; Martin Hardy—and you—all coming together—!

It almost looks as if Fate were taking a hand in your affairs, Chetwood."

"That's it, O'Malley! That's it exactly! I have felt that way about it all and I want you to let Fate finish the job as it is ordained it should be finished."

"And your daughter—finding her like that—!" went on the Inspector, ignoring the interruption. "How did you recognize her?"

Fawcett's eyes were glowing with a warm light as he spoke of Joyce. It had not been a case of recognizing her exactly, he explained; for years he had known all about her, had followed her growth and education, had kept tab on her life with the Hardys in Montreal, had sometimes stood close to her in a crowd, unknown to her. But he had never revealed himself to her nor to her guardian; he had not dared, believing it safest that they should consider him dead. Yes, he had suffered, God knew!

"But all that is changed now. I will be able to claim her. Think of it! My little girl!" He gazed at the opposite wall in rapt retrospection. "Then things happened so quickly," he resumed in narration, "and she told me things. . . . A plan came to me whereby I could correct the whole situation. You must let me go north to carry out that plan, O'Malley."

"Plan, plan . . . to correct what? I have no idea what you have in mind, Fawcett; but if it is

some move to deal with Dureau, something dramatic——” He shook his head emphatically. “Poetic justice don’t go around here; you must know that. I have already arranged to take official action in connection with your case. I have talked to Steve and he is going north in a couple of days to arrest Jean Dureau. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly,” nodded Fawcett. He had anticipated something of the sort. “But there is something you have overlooked, Inspector,” he said dryly.

“Explain.”

“Steve’s love for Joyce,” and the woodsman’s steady gaze would not release the big Irishman. It was patent that Fawcett had touched him in a vulnerable spot.

“What has that to do with it?” he demanded gruffly.

“Everything. It is chiefly on that account that I am here. I have known that boy for years and I should be proud to have him marry my girl. Also, I think his love is returned.”

“Well? I still don’t follow you.”

“A while ago you said that, strictly speaking, the Hardy case—the affair of Martin Hardy and his brother—had nothing to do with me. Do you not see now that it has everything to do with me?”

“Steve and Joyce, you mean? But is it neces-

sary for them to know—? Look here, Chetwood—!”

“Call me Fawcett, Inspector,” warned the other, “for a while longer, at any rate. Joyce already knows the story—about the Hardy brothers. Steve is bound to find out—”

“Stop!” commanded O’Malley sharply. “Let me be very sure that I understand you. Your daughter knows—Well, what does she know?”

“Only what Jean Dureau has told her.”

“How do you know he has told her anything? She talked with you about it?”

“No. But I heard him tell her, late one night. I was watching for such an interview to take place and I listened — just outside the door,” said Fawcett calmly.

“And you did not interfere?”

“The right time for interference had not arrived.”

“Dureau . . . Dureau,” muttered O’Malley to himself. “Yes, he was at Dawson at the time the shooting occurred, of course. He would know about the Hardy brothers. He married—”

His face paled. His chair was upset with the suddenness of his uprising. Like a great giant he stood beside Fawcett, glaring down at him, holding him by the shoulder with an iron grip.

“Man, you know something! What do you know about this Hardy affair? Answer me! I want the truth!”

"You seem interested," countered Fawcett easily and, watching O'Malley's struggle to control himself, he knew that he was gaining ground. "You were on hand when the thing happened. You have not lost track of Martin Hardy; you must have known of his yearly visits in this neighborhood. Yet you have made no move to apprehend him. And you have not instructed Steve to arrest his uncle when he goes north, have you?"

O'Malley righted his chair and dropped into it, frowning down at the floor, groping uncertainly for reply.

"And you were the means of saving Hardy's life," went on Fawcett relentlessly, "up there at Dawson, from the gang that would have strung him up. . . ." He paused at the other's quick gesture of command.

"There was no evidence, not even circumstantial, in the eyes of the law—no real proof. Yes, I have always considered him innocent. We followed it up; but until some new evidence is forthcoming—"

"That is why I must go north, Inspector, and carry out my own plans in my own way—without question."

"Impossible! You mean you can obtain new evidence?" O'Malley eyed him sharply.

"Yes."

For a few moments there was absolute silence

while the two men looked at each other, reading each other. It is in such moments that great decisions are made.

"You—know?" questioned O'Malley in a weak voice.

"Perhaps you are right, Inspector."

"Ah!" It was not much more than a breath.

"There is nothing to be gained by postponement of what must be," said Fawcett solemnly. "The crimes of men find them out sooner or later. There is a Power which acts in mysterious ways, O'Malley, to right the wrongs which men do and mete out justice and it is not for me nor you to stand in the way of that justice. There is no peace of mind to be gained—"

"Are you daring to infer—?"

"Nothing!" retorted Fawcett. "I know what you are thinking—that you can make me speak, here and now. If necessary, I will tell you what I suspect happened on the night that Lawrence Hardy was shot to death; but I warn you that it will not be worth anything to you—without other evidence. It is your duty to let me go north to work out things in my own way. Steve can go with me and will be there to do all that is necessary in the name of your mighty Law. Is that sufficient? Steve will need watching—"

"Yes, and so will you!" O'Malley cut in grimly.

"Then the combination will be perfect. You

have your own motives—none of my business—for shielding Martin Hardy—”

Inspector O'Malley sprang from his chair, his eyes blazing in quick wrath; but, even so, he turned at Fawcett's ejaculation and glanced swiftly out the window to which the woodsman was pointing. There was a sound of hurried footsteps and he just had time to regain his seat at the desk and pick up his pen with what show of calmness he could muster.

Fawcett had vanished into the washroom.

CHAPTER XXIII

STEVE closed the door behind him and stood there with his back against it while he looked across the room with unwavering regard. O'Malley's greeting he ignored and the Inspector sat back in his chair and studied the set face as the young man walked towards the desk.

"What's your trouble, boy?" he asked anxiously.

"Where's Crawley?"

"I sent him out on a message. Why, do you want him?"

"No, I came to see you on a personal matter." He leaned on both hands across the desk. "I want to know who is responsible for my father's death. Who murdered him?"

O'Malley sat motionless. It had come—the situation he had sought to avoid. The problem it presented to him was difficult to meet; but it had to be met. It was not a time for beating about the bush.

"Your mother—" he began.

"I have talked with her. I have come straight here. I want to know who killed my father. You know."

"I wish to God I did!"

"Was it my uncle, Martin Hardy?"

"I— don't— know. Now sit down, Steve, and keep yourself under control."

The words seemed to sting to the quick. "Keep under control"—always that! Did they think he was a fool?

"You— don't— know!" he repeated. "Yet it happened over fifteen years ago and you were there when it happened as the representative of the finest police force in the world—What's the answer to that?"

The color left O'Malley's face, but he managed to control his voice; anger edged it with ice.

"You know the answer to impertinence, young man! Remember who you are speaking to!"

Steve eyed him coldly.

"I am not on duty just now," he retorted. "I am here as a private citizen, seeking for information to which I am entitled, concerning a murder in the Klondyke, fifteen years ago. I remember that I am speaking to the man who knows the police record of the case and he happens also to be the man who has connived with my mother—"

"Steve! Be careful what you say!"

"—connived with my mother to keep me in ignorance of the true circumstances surrounding my father's death!" he finished bitterly. "I want to know why. I demand an answer, O'Malley!"

"You arrive very opportunely, Steve," and at

sound of this unexpected intrusion, Steve faced about quickly to see Fawcett standing at the washroom door, calmly wiping his hands on a towel. Steve glanced in swift interrogation from Fawcett to O'Malley, then back again. "We were just discussing the case and I think it would be as well for us all to get together—"

"What the devil has it got to do with you?" cried Steve, half angry, wholly perplexed.

"Everything. It concerns me as much as it does you."

Steve stared at him, trying to understand this astonishing statement. His gaze switched to O'Malley; but the Inspector, feeling the futility of his position, was sitting back in his chair to await developments, which promised to come fast enough.

"Well? Go on! Talk, damn it!"

"What do you want to know?" countered Fawcett, coming forward and bestriding a chair.

"If you know so much—where are Miss Chetwood and Miss Hardy?"

"They left town a little over an hour ago on the steamer—with Mr. Martin Hardy; he came in on this morning's train."

Understanding the significance of this and sensing a crisis, O'Malley could only shake his head solemnly. A flush of anger slowly mounted in the young man's cheeks.

"Did you know of this yesterday?—that they

intended leaving on that boat?—that Hardy was expected?"

Fawcett shook his head. He got up and began to pace the room slowly, thinking. There was almost a hopeless note in his voice when he spoke.

"Steve, why don't you be a man? Did you ever consider that there are others in the world beside yourself? If you would only stop to think calmly . . . analyze the root of things . . . instead of jeopardizing the very happiness you seek . . ." He smiled sadly.

"We are not inventing riddles!" cried Steve impatiently. "I am not here to listen to any sermon! There have been queer goings-on, Fawcett, and I want to know what's what. Answer my questions!"

"It is no time for frantic demonstrations of childishness!" said Fawcett severely. "Why don't you think of others? Has it occurred to you that a great shadow has fallen over the life of that girl you are so interested in, turning her joy . . . ?" His voice failed him.

Steve started. He looked at Fawcett intently, trying to fathom the emotion which was apparent, and his face blanched.

"You refer to Joyce as if—as if you loved her! Do you?"

"Love her?" His eyes shone. "Yes, I love her, with a love alongside of which your's is but—"

Steve was across the room in two bounds. The

blow which he aimed deflected harmlessly off the woodsman's quick guard. Fawcett swung automatically with his right to the jaw and knocked the assailant in a heap at his feet. The thing had happened so unexpectedly that he glanced over at O'Malley with surprise still in possession; unless his senses deceived him, he saw a faint smile creep into the Inspector's face.

It was gone instantly. O'Malley came from his desk as Steve rose dazedly to his feet.

"You deserved that!" he asserted sternly. "What's the matter with you? If you must always have that everlasting temper, for God's sake go away somewhere!" He turned back to the desk and picked up the stub of his cigar. His hand shook as he lighted it.

Fawcett had not moved. With his eyes on Steve, he spoke to O'Malley in a strained voice.

"I thought you said you had told him—about me."

"I did; but not about your daughter—not in so many words. If he wasn't such a young fool—! That's right, Steve, she's his daughter! If you've got a head—for the love of heaven, use it!"

Sudden comprehension overwhelmed Steve. He looked from one to the other and a slow flush suffused him. He wondered now at his own stupidity. Joyce Chetwood—George Chetwood's daughter—the baby girl! Martin Hardy had taken her from the cabin in the Klondyke . . . ! As he

stared at Fawcett his mind raced backward over recent events with new understanding. Shamefacedly, he approached and held out his hand.

"Will you forgive me, Dean?" he asked simply, and as they gripped with feeling, a wonderful respect for his old friend glowed in his eyes. "I—I am worried about her; I am afraid she is going into danger—"

"Yes," admitted Fawcett. "And we are going north by the next boat, Steve, my boy—" He turned to O'Malley. "I think, Inspector, that you had better review the whole situation for Steve's benefit."

So, clearing his throat, O'Malley crystallized the situation. It was a situation for which, conjure his memory as he might, he could recall no precedent. He sensed what must have happened between Mrs. Hardy and the girl; Lucy had overridden his advice and told the young woman the things he had warned her against. The girl had gone away that very morning, rather than face Steve; Steve had found out and was convinced that unless the matter were cleared up, Joyce Chetwood would never consent to become his wife. Now that the thing had gone so far, it was best to have it out and as he talked he began to share in Fawcett's confidence that Fate was taking a hand and would bring things to their logical conclusion. He saw more clearly Fawcett's position—and Steve's. Both were vitally

concerned in the outcome. He came to his decision.

"Steve, as a member of the Force, knowing its traditions,—and as a gentleman, you will realize my position. Things are badly tangled and only by new evidence can they be straightened out. That is something wherein Fawcett claims to be able to help us, but only if he is allowed to work it out in his own way. I am going to overlook what has transpired here this morning—my interview with Fawcett. I am going to let him go north of his own free will. If you meet him up there in your official capacity, I will receive your report. You understand? I am leaving it to you to make whatever arrests you find necessary."

Fawcett jumped from his chair and reached for the Inspector's hand.

"You will never regret this, O'Malley!" he declared with shining eyes.

"Silence!" cried the Inspector in his sternest voice.

"Sergeant Hardy, I know nothing of this man! Understand me? Arrest him if need be!"

Steve saluted, trying to suppress a grin.

"You are being sent north to arrest Jean Dureau and James Mangers—for criminal assault and coercion. Bring them in. Good luck to you! There's the door!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE Lower Landing at the top of Sturgeon Lake presented a scene of activity when the steamer *Nipwam* drew alongside the dock about noon. A light snow was falling; yet in spite of it doors and windows were open, suggesting that the inhabitants were too busy to close them. There was no semblance of order; tents and log cabins were scattered promiscuously, erected in any likely spot, while everywhere lay canoes and bales of merchandise, piled anyhow. White men and Indians hurried back and forth, mingling their talk with hoarse laughter and profanity. Occasionally a woman made a brief appearance. Dominating all sounds was an insistent howling from hundreds of dogs.

"I'm beginning to feel excited again," Dorothy declared as she stepped from the gangplank.

Joyce, too, feigned a certain careless spirit; but gone were her old feelings of delight for this journey. She felt, rather, the tension of one who is about to witness a great drama.

Hardy led the way to a small whitewashed cabin near the water's edge. A short, weazened Englishman and his halfbreed wife lived here and were old friends. They afforded instant welcome.

While the girls were finishing dinner, Martin Hardy helped Marshall hitch his team to the wagon and load it; for there was indication of an impending snow-storm and Hardy was anxious to make the camp before night.

"The old settlement has changed, Marshall,—all these would-be gold-diggers . . ."

"Yus, blimy, yus." The old man rammed the char of tobacco far down into the bowl of his pipe. "Poor blighters! but they're up against it," he added sagely, unconsciously mixing his native dialect with that of his neighbors.

"You mean the weather," Hardy nodded. "I am afraid there will be a lot of hardship; but men were always fools where gold is concerned."

Marshall swore in pure cockney.

"I 'ope you hintend to git back soon. "Hit's goin' to be a 'ard winter."

"It's certainly starting early enough."

Joyce came to the door and stood, watching them, then made for their wraps.

"Come, Dolly, they're ready and it's snowing like everything." She tucked a stray tendril of hair inside her woolen tam.

On the trip north to Beaver Landing at the upper end of the wagon trail few words passed between the little party. Joyce, watching her guardian's face occasionally, could not but admire the frank courage which it revealed; whatever lay ahead of them, he intended to meet it

with the granite cheerfulness that typified his personality.

To the older girl, whose soul was full of foreboding, even the trail appeared unfamiliar. Under its cover of wet snow every tree, every bush and rock looked different. All nature seemed stupified; the quietude was vast. Nor did the overcast sky hold any prospect of withholding more snow. An occasional snatch of conversation and the muffled rattle of the wagon wheels pushing in the soft snow alone broke the mighty silence.

The trail widened as it approached Beaver Landing. Long before they reached the first outlying cabins they caught the faint yelping of dogs. The noise increased gradually until, topping the crest, they looked down upon the little settlement below, bubbling now in the height of its fame.

The girls went at once to the welcome shelter of Mrs. Hayley while Hardy and Marshall sought for someone who would canoe the party across the lake. They experienced some difficulty in this, the majority of the available canoes having been purchased or hired already by the crowd of prospectors who were anxious to stake before the freeze-up. Finally old Indian Joe agreed to make the trip.

Martin Hardy's assertion that he intended to make his own camp that very night caused Mrs. Hayley to stare at him with some astonishment and even to voice a protest. The first real storm

of winter was liable to sweep down any time now; every night there was a heavy frost.

"You are not thinking of taking the young ladies with you, Mr. Hardy?"

Joyce glanced quickly at him, trying to divine his thoughts. Her suspicions were soon confirmed, for he promptly shook his head.

"I go on alone, of course, Mrs. Hayley. I know the girls will be comfortable here with you."

"Sure they will! Oh, sure!" the good woman cried, smoothing her apron, her eyes lighting with satisfaction. It was companionship of her own sex for which she longed. "I will take good care of them."

"But—" objected Joyce, "but—Oh, I realize that it is late and that there might be a storm; but I want to go."

Hardy removed his cigar from his mouth and regarded her.

"Aw, Joyce, now don't go and spoil the arrangement! Let's stay here where it's so warm and comfortable." Dorothy's sensitive little face pleaded seriously and Joyce saw that she was afraid to go.

"Very well. I will stay if daddy promises to come back quickly," she decided. "And to do—what I wish," she added, looking gravely into his eyes.

She went to him anxiously and he put his arm

around her with a reassuring pat. He kissed her hastily, kissed Dorothy with equal haste and proceeded to get into his heavy overcoat.

"Don't worry about me now. I'll be all O.K. Back as soon as possible. Goodbye, everybody," and with that he went.

From the window the girls watched him step into the crazy birch-bark canoe with his Indian, watched them paddle north until the falling snow whipped them from sight.

It promised to be no pleasant trip; but as Martin Hardy kept up the ceaseless paddling the occasional shudder which he gave was not entirely due to the cold. His thoughts were not good company. The fact that Joyce knew everything—that was ever at his elbow to disturb him. He saw now what madness it had been to leave her alone with Dureau at the camp. He visualized with surprising sureness all that had happened while he was away. Dureau had imposed his will upon her—had told her enough to make her feel it her duty to protect her guardian. The strange sense of detachment that had so suddenly sprung up between them—he could feel it now. He felt it always!

In those few hours which it took them to reach the camp, Martin Hardy lived again the familiar scenes of the life in which his foster daughter had had a part. They had been so happy together;

there had been such mutual comradeship! It hurt to think of the change which had taken place so suddenly in her attitude. He could not blame her, of course. Fate had thrown her in contact with Dureau—Fate, assisted by his own lack of forethought. Dureau had won and he would have to capitulate. Bitter as was the thought, he felt the thing coming as a mathematical certainty. He would have to capitulate! The old circle was closing around him again!

A guttural grunt from his guide he interpreted as a warning that they were near their destination. The storm had grown considerable and it was impossible to see clearly; but the old Indian had not erred and presently they sprang from the canoe and drew it well out of harm's way.

Up the familiar path to the cabin where a yellow window blurred through the snow-ridden air. He glanced to the left as they silently passed Mauger's tent. Except for a wide patch where the stove-pipe came through, it was sagging with snow. The lantern inside cast two dim shadows. Portent of the thing which had come upon him—the everlasting shadow that he could not blot out! He could hear their muffled voices.

He turned away with an inward groan. Presently he quietly tried the cabin door and found it locked. So Gus evidently feared treachery, he thought grimly. He knocked very gently; then a

little louder. After a pause he heard the sound of shuffling feet within and a loud grumble from Gus. He called through the crack of the door.

"Open up, Gus! It's me—Hardy," and he could hear the big Swede swearing in his amazement.

The door opened slowly, then was flung wide to admit them to the cozy warmth within. Gus shut the door and followed him to the stove, scratching his head.

"What the—!" He grinned hugely and glanced down at his hand. "Smokin' one of your cigars, boss!" but Hardy paid no heed.

"Get some tea, Gus—and keep things warm. It's a night for indoors! That's right, Joe, make yourself at home. Tea, Gus—pails of it!—and plenty of grub!"

He gazed about the familiar interior, shaking his head. The thoughts it stirred in him!

"Dureau and Mangers—still here, I notice."

"You bet they're still here, boss," nodded Gus significantly.

"They don't know I've arrived. We'll let them wait till morning to find out, Gus. I'm going to bed as soon as we've eaten."

An hour later Gus still sat by the fire, smoking. Indian Joe was curled up in his blankets in the corner of the kitchen nearest the stove. Gus grinned as he listened to the occasional soft swish

of the snow against the window; it would be bad in the tent. Now that the boss was back. . . Gus smoked contentedly. He was fabricating wonderful dramas in his brain—dramas in which were ever two “crooks” who invariably received the just desserts of heavy villainy.

CHAPTER XXV

THE little steamer which had carried Hardy and his girls north returned on the third day and Fawcett immediately sought out its skipper. He did not have to ask about the departure of the two young women; he had seen them go aboard himself and knew it would be useless to ask Lester the reason for it. All that the worthy captain could say was that the young ladies had arrived unexpectedly, that Hardy had come aboard and that he had pulled out from the dock two hours before schedule, as arranged. He appeared to be genuinely upset about the whole affair and told Fawcett so.

"I'm going to get into trouble about this yet!" he stormed, resenting Fawcett's remark that with the young women aboard there had been no need to leave ahead of time.

"I want you to save a cabin, going back," instructed Fawcett, ignoring the other's indignation. "Sergeant Steve and I are going up with you this time. Also, I want you to save accommodation for a lady who may come in on this morning's train."

Captain Lester gently felt his chin.

"Oh-ho!" he grinned. "Becomin' quite a

ladies' man, Dean! Little mystery somewhere, eh? Well, bring 'em along! We sure need some refinin' influence these days!"

"No mystery, Tom," reproved Fawcett. "But no brass bands or speeches of welcome, just the same. Train's late this morning, but I guess we'll all be aboard by eleven-thirty."

"Here, aint you goin' to tell me the lady's name? How can I enter a reservation—?"

"Madame Dureau."

"French? Say, any relation to that Frenchman I took up a while back—same name? Say, now, he was askin' the way to the Hardy camp—" The little captain's eyes glowed with admiration for his own perspicacity.

"I think the lady is his wife," said Fawcett, turning on his heel. "So long!"

The train from Winnipeg was expected to arrive about nine o'clock. Would she be on it, he wondered as he walked rapidly towards the depot. So much depended upon it! In his mind's eye he saw again the telegram that Dureau had written and left for Gus Jonsen to despatch—back in the tent that morning—telling her to return immediately to New York. It had been a simple matter to alter the wording; but had it reached her? If so, would she obey what must appear to her as a rather strange summons?

As he stood on the platform, idly waiting in the motley crowd for the train's approach, Fawcett

wondered how he would know her. What would she look like? It was his intention to introduce himself to the most likely looking woman who came off the train and trust to luck and instinct to pick the right one. He glanced about him at many familiar faces among the old weather-beaten prospectors and was careful to keep near them; they might come in useful as his own credentials.

The train got there at last and soon the platform presented a jostling humanity that clamored for business, for information; that touted for hotels and the privilege of carrying luggage. Fawcett's tall figure stood to full height as he eagerly surveyed the scene, watching for the woman he sought with an outward calm that gave no hint of his inward disturbance. He saw several step from the coaches.

Then he knew her. There could be no mistake. She carried herself with such a regal air of importance that the idly curious paused to watch her movements, to admire her clothes and criticise her features. She came to a halt near the agent's office and Fawcett quickly elbowed his way towards her. As she turned her dark eyes full upon him the blood quickened in his veins and he realized all at once the magnitude of the plan he had dared to concoct.

"Are you Madame Dureau?" he asked in a low polite voice, removing his hat. "My name is Dean

Fawcett and I have come from Monsieur to guide you north."

As he waited for her to speak he had time to take note of her more closely. She was undoubtedly a striking woman. Clothed in a heavy seal-skin coat, her raven head protected by a jaunty fur toque which set off the olive face beneath—she was romantically beautiful. Only about the corners of her languid dark eyes was a certain hardness while the expression of her pretty face carried a faint suggestion of superciliousness. He got a glimpse of pearly teeth as her carmined lips parted.

"Oh, that will be so nice of you! Of course,—you have an introduction to show to me?" Her voice was soft, refined.

Fawcett had expected this question and he replied promptly.

"Yes, Madame, I had one; but unfortunately I met with an accident, coming down, which deprived me of it. The canoe upset and I think it must have been while drying my clothes that the note dropped out of my pocket. I did not miss it until some time after," he smiled unflinchingly.

Madame raised a dainty eyebrow in surprise and favored him with a look from her dark eyes. He could feel that look searching his superficialities.

"Yes! That is very sad. Strange, but I believe you, monsieur. You may take my bag."

Fawcett bowed to hide the gleam of triumph in his eyes. As they slowly made their way through the crowd one and another called out to him, wishing him luck. Certain of their remarks, added in undertone, reached Madame's ears for which they were evidently not intended.

"It is not usual for ladies to travel north, monsieur?" There was a certain amusement in her tone.

"Oh—yes—sometimes," Fawcett responded, dropping at once into unsociable silence. It was not his intention to get into conversation with her—yet.

On the way to the dock she entertained him with a monologue which was replete with veiled sarcasms about her journey and reflections upon her sanity for coming at all. It was with relief that Fawcett turned her over to Captain Lester who came forward gallantly, plainly impressed.

The tall woodsman hurried below to locate Steve. His instructions had been explicit that on no account was Steve to show himself on the upper deck and the questions of the mystified young "mountie" he had evaded by a plea for patience. Steve had not seen them come aboard and now greeted him with more questions that would not be denied. So Fawcett told him all about it.

"It's the first move in the game, Steve, and the luck is with us. We will go up presently and you will meet her; but not until we're well away.

Whatever happens, remember you know nothing about anything. I wish to God we were at the end of the trip!"

Steve looked at him quickly, but said nothing. It was not easy to hold himself in; little chills of unexplained things came to him. Fawcett, too, he noted, was feeling the strain. Above them the siren, tooting with stupid gaiety, was a welcome sound and presently the steamer swung from her dock.

The air was sharp with warning of winter's nearness and the sting in the wind that blew down the river drove the passengers to the smoking-room or sheltered positions. Fawcett, glancing about him and comparing the scattered figures with the crowd that had gone up on the previous trip, guessed that this would be the last trip which the *Nipwam* would be making to the top of Sturgeon Lake this season. He would have to see Lester about that and find out for sure.

"I guess we can go up now, Steve," but at the foot of the companionway he paused a moment. "Things may happen rather suddenly—perhaps strangely—I don't know," he said with a worried look. "Keep yourself in hand; it depends on you."

From the promenade deck a magnificent view of the mighty river was to be had; but the wind was too unpleasant for most of the passengers and the deck was practically deserted. The state-

ly figure of Madame Dureau, however, wrapped snugly in her furs, was in sight at the far end, slowly approaching. Little was said by the two men who leaned over the rail, awaiting the meeting.

"How long will it be now, monsieur, before we reach the camp?" came the soft, musing voice at their elbow.

Fawcett turned instantly with a welcoming inclination of the head.

"To-morrow at noon we reach what is known as the Lower Landing, madame, and if the weather is kind to us, we should be at the camp before nightfall."

She raised two small, neatly gloved hands in comic despair.

"It is so very cold up here!" she cried with a shrug of her expressive shoulders. "And the trip,—it will be by canoe, monsieur?"

"Oh, it will be quite safe—the canoe," Fawcett laughed. "My friend, Sergeant Hardy, will accompany us."

There was a startled expression in her eyes.

"The name—I did not hear . . ."

Fawcett introduced them formally. Steve uncovered, bowing stiffly in an excess of restraint, while she stared blankly into his face. Her gaze fluttered away and she caught her breath; then she held out her hand to him, smiling charmingly.

"Ah, oui!" she murmured. "I am so pleased!"

That was all and Fawcett breathed more freely as she proceeded to talk vivaciously of inconsequential things. She had herself well in hand thereafter as they promenaded the deck. Nor was there anything further untoward in her manner during the remainder of the boat journey.

At the Lower Landing next day before leaving the steamer Fawcett spoke to Captain Lester about the *Nipwam's* movements and learned that as this was the last trip for the season it was the skipper's intention to remain at the Lower Landing four or five days, perhaps a full week. This suited Fawcett, who informed him that there would be quite a crowd returning from the Hardy camp—if nothing happened to prevent.

Winter was reaching out her icy grip, feeling for firmer hold on the country day by day; ice was forming in the bays around the shores of the lake; the vast timberland to the north was banked in snow, majestic in primordial solitude. Intricate against the cold blue sky the tracery of the naked poplars edged the forest. The snow was not yet in a condition for sleighing; but again old Marshall came to the rescue with his ancient team, "plying between" the Landings, as Captain Lester described it.

Topping the ridge at the upper end of the wagon-road two hours later, the party found Beaver Landing below wreathed in a faint bluish vapor. Away to the north stretched the lake,

shining now in the last rays of the setting sun—a finger of gold, shot down from cloud banks. The silence seemed not the silence of sleep, but rather of calm before storm as if the landscape had resigned itself to the inevitable and supinely awaited the boisterous entry of Winter to his domain.

Mrs. Hayley's low-roofed rambling abode welcomed them with briskly smoking chimneys and newly lighted lamps. It was a gust of grateful warmth that smote them upon the threshold and Mrs. Haley promptly took possession of the fatigued Madame with genial surprise. Never before in the history of her establishment had she had three city ladies under her roof at one time and she grew as nearly excited as she ever became. Madame Dureau, however, was too completely disgusted with the whole journey by this time to respond to garrulous overtures and even the appetizing odors of a good dinner were offset by the prospect of the canoe trip which would immediately follow it. Dorothy and Joyce she snubbed promptly as "chits of girls" entirely beneath her attention.

The unexpected presence of Joyce threw Steve into temporary panic; it was some time before he could decide what to say to her and he felt very ill at ease. Although his pulses were pounding at the nearness of her, his manner carried a gravity and stiffness that he could not overcome.

It was almost as if he had practiced aloofness with Madame Dureau with such success that he could not get rid of it now or as if he felt that Joyce owed him an explanation for leaving Le Pas so unceremoniously. It served to remind the girl sharply of that which had come between them and she treated him with equal artificiality.

"You and Mr. Fawcett are going over to the camp, I suppose?" she asked.

"Yes—right after dinner, I guess."

"The lady is Dureau's wife, I presume. Why is she here?"

"I don't know," Steve evaded. "Not exactly. Fawcett brought her."

She glanced in swift surprise at the tall woodsman, then back to the six-foot manifestation of diffidence who stood uncomfortably first on one foot, then the other.

"What are you here for?" was the next question.

"I—I don't know that either—not exactly—sort o' chaperoning, I guess."

The call to dinner rescued him and with a breath of relief he sought a place at the table between Fawcett and Dorothy. He felt utterly despondent. The excellent food and the animated table talk brightened him a little. It seemed to revive Joyce, too; so that she even smiled at him faintly once or twice.

It was just while they were preparing to depart that the girl drew him anxiously to one side.

"I wanted to go over to the camp with you, but Mr. Fawcett refuses absolutely to take me . . ."

"Quite right," commended Steve promptly. "There's a bad storm brewing."

She searched for double meaning anxiously.

"Steve—daddy said he would return here for us almost at once and—he refused to take us over there with him—and I am beginning to be afraid."

"Nonsense! He's all right with Gus to look after him. Gus is a wonder for that." He did not meet her gaze as he spoke.

"But, Steve—he has been gone four days!"

"That's nothing in this kind of weather. We'll all be back here in a day or two at the outside. Goodbye—Joyce."

"Good-bye," she said in a low firm voice.

He could not know that she was trembling with a fear she dare not name.

CHAPTER XXVI

LONG before the lone canoe had arrived at the camp the sky had become filled with drifting masses of grey clouds and with the going down of the sun a biting wind had sprung up in the north. It whistled through the nearby trees and droned through the reaches of the forest like the distant roar of ocean surf. Beneath it's lash the lake waters whipped into catpaws and it was with some anxiety that Fawcett plied his paddle and sought the lee of the shore line wherever possible.

Madame complained bitterly throughout the entire trip; but she got little sympathy from the men whose full attention was required by the work in hand. Darkness had long since descended and only the knowledge of the lake, possessed by both men, enabled them to continue. As it was, it was treacherous going which became increasingly difficult as the storm swept closer. If they could only make the camp before it broke they would be fortunate and as neither of them relished the idea of spending a storm-ridden night in the open—such a storm as promised at that season—they paddled as if their very lives depended upon it.

They got there just in time, the first icy par-

ticles stinging their faces as they hauled the canoe ashore. As he helped their lady passenger from her cramped position Fawcett felt his first trepidation. In the gloom her pale face shone dimly, uncanny. She was silent as she moved stiffly between the men like a sleep-walker. Fawcett glanced anxiously towards Dureau's tent as they passed it, fearful that the Frenchman's voice might rise above the wind and that the woman might recognize it. But the tent was in darkness and no sound issued from it.

He knocked once on the cabin door, then opened it, indicating that Madame should enter. He followed and Steve closed the door behind him. Their advent was so sudden and unexpected that for a moment there was neither sound nor movement from the occupants of the room. Near the stove Gus was seated, his pipe in his mouth and his chin still sunk on his chest as he looked up through his heavy blond eyebrows. There was no sign of Martin Hardy; but seated at a deal table, poring over a scatter of maps and papers, were Jean Dureau and James Maugers.

The Frenchman peered across the room curiously, shading his eyes from the rays of the lamp. He recognized all three at once; but the shock of seeing his wife standing there alongside Fawcett and the young sergeant posed him rigid. Maugers was in like stupefaction.

Dureau was the first to recover. He rose slowly from his chair and crossed to her.

"Miriam!" he gasped. "What are you doing here? *Mon dieu!* what's happened?"

"You sent for me, Jean. I am here." Her eyes appealed to him for sympathy. This was surely strange welcome! She was feeling tired and cold and she shuddered as she stepped over to the box stove and held out benumbed fingers to the heat.

Outside the storm broke suddenly, the wind whirling through the trees with a mad roar, whipping gusts of snow against the window-panes in needle-like stabs.

"She's going to be a bad one," Gus commented. He jerked his head towards the window. But it was as if he had not spoken for all the attention the remark earned.

"Sent— for— you?" repeated Dureau in amazement, trying to grasp the situation.

"Aren't you glad to see her?" This from Fawcett with a short laugh as he hung his heavy mackinaw on the back of a chair and shook his cap.

Maugers, sensing the unusual, heaved from his chair with a mutter.

"Say, this looks like—"

"None of your business!" finished Steve sharply as he took up a position alongside the mining-engineer. "Sit down again! Keep down!" In sudden review what had happened between this

hulk and Joyce brought the anger flushing into his face; his teeth clenched and—

“Steve!” Fawcett’s cool voice with its note of warning steadied him.

Dureau had sunk into a chair, his mind working, his little black eyes gleaming with calculation. He paid no attention to his wife now and it was Fawcett who helped her off with her coat and brought a chair to her beside the stove. Dureau watched the proceeding, studied Fawcett.

“Gus, you might dig up a pot of hot tea. Where is the boss?”

Gus grunted, suspicion lurking in his look. The long days since Hardy had returned had filled his heart with nothing else. He had overheard what passed between Dureau and Martin Hardy and the amazement with which he had seen the latter “cave in” had turned to an all-absorbing resentment and a mulish determination. But for the hole in the canoe, which he had punctured deliberately, they would have been away before this and the whole deal consummated irrevocably. Indian Joe had gone back promptly and a damaged canoe was the only way he could think of to delay the deal. Gus could not understand what it was all about but in the back of his head had been a determination to give Dureau “a run for his money.”

“What the hell all this?” he rumbled at Fawcett. He knew he could trust the woodsman,

however, and at last he took himself off to the kitchen.

"Did you get my message, instructing you to return to New York?" demanded Dureau suddenly, and his wife looked at him, startled by the intensity with which he spoke, no less than the question itself.

"No. The message—it did not say for me to go to New York. It told me to come to you here, quick. I am here. It was one awful trip!" she complained bitterly. "Yet I find you not sick! I do not understand . . ."

Dureau's eyes turned on Fawcett with cold anger.

"You were in that tent and saw me leave that message on the box by the door for Gus to take to the Landing. You were there, Fawcett! The Swede would have no object—he wouldn't have the brains—it must have been you, eh? You read the message, perhaps? None o' your damned business; but you read it, eh? What did it say. Tell her—for her to return to New York, was it not?"

"Yes, that's what it said—at first," replied Fawcett slowly and there was challenge in the tone.

"I thought so. You changed it, eh? You there, policeman! You hear that? He has committed forgery—changed the meaning of a telegram to my wife, causing her to come up here to this God-

forsaken hole instead of going to her home. What are you going to do about it?" He was on his feet now, his voice loud with anger.

Madame Dureau turned quickly upon Fawcett and read the confirmation in his face.

"It is true? Then there must be some reason why you did such a thing as that, monsieur. Explain to me, please."

"There is," Fawcett said simply.

What she would have said further was checked by the sudden appearance of Martin Hardy in the doorway of the little bedroom. She stood, transfixed. Then, still with her eyes upon him, she edged towards her husband, feeling for him with an outstretched hand which presently clutched his arm in terror.

"Look at him! Look at him!"

"Hush!" He shook her as he turned, something of her fear coming into his own eyes as he groped for understanding.

Martin Hardy's tense attitude relaxed. He came slowly into the room, glancing upon each of the new arrivals in turn, then faced the woman. The fear that he read in her expression brought him deep satisfaction. It could not be by accident that she was here . . . !

"You are something of a stranger, Madame," he said with unction by way of greeting.

Nobody spoke or moved. Gus stared in at them from the kitchen doorway. The snow swept

against the window-panes and the roar of the forest penetrated the storm-beaten cabin.

"I heard something about a forgery," went on Martin Hardy calmly. "I was asleep. Will you tell me, Fawcett?"

"I'll tell you!" cried Mangers, unable longer to contain himself. "This man Fawcett, who has made enough trouble already,—he changed the wording of a telegram which Dureau gave Gus to take over to the Landing while you were away. So't she came all the way up here instead of going home to New York from Winnipeg."

"Keep out of this, Mangers!" commanded Dureau.

"Not on your life, Dureau! This looks to me like some kind of a frame-up; but I'm not in it, see!" The two men glared at each other.

"Would you mind telling me why you have done this?" Dureau looked at Fawcett now. "What's your game? Who the devil are you that you should meddle in my affairs?"

"You are still blind, then, Dureau? It is unfortunate that I have shaved so recently. Perhaps if there were a beard—? No! We met in the Klondyke about sixteen years ago. You were then given to the youthful folly of wife-stealing—! You remember something of that?"

It was Madame Dureau who intervened, demanding explanation.

"I have only to refer you to a miner's cabin

a little way off the trail out of Dawson, Madame. It was the home of a man named Chetwood. My name is George Chetwood!"

A few seconds of stupified amazement, while husband and wife stared at him, speechless, white to the lips. Then Martin Hardy was across the room and grasped Fawcett by the shoulders, gazing intently into his face.

"You are George Chetwood? Can it be true?" Even as he asked the question, he fell back a step, noting the resemblance, and a few words from Fawcett regarding that interview of long ago was proof sufficient. Their hands met in an iron grip and something of the moment's emotion between the two men affected Steve as he watched. Joyce's father! Joyce's foster father! What a bond between!

And it was at this very moment that above the frenzy of the storm there rose a pounding at the door. The next instant the latch lifted and the wind banged it open. In a swirl of snow two muffled figures came staggering across the threshold.

Steve sprang to close the door, while Martin Hardy and Fawcett helped to remove the coverings, stiff with frozen water, from the newcomers.

"Ugh!" grunted old Indian Joe. "Heap damn bad!"

"Oh, daddy! I am so glad to get here!" sobbed Joyce.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE girl recovered herself quickly and bravely faced the others in the room. Her cheeks had been whipped to a bright red by the wind and her manner was no less hectic with excitement. Driven by anxiety, she had persuaded Indian Joe to bring her and they had followed on the heels of Fawcett's departure from the Landing.

"My dear child, how foolish!" exclaimed Martin Hardy in fond reproof. "You took a terrible risk. You are exhausted. Won't you go in and lie down—?"

She flashed a look about the room and shook her head.

"There is something wrong here. I want to know what it is. I think I have a right to know."

Martin Hardy looked at Fawcett and shook his head helplessly. The woodsman read the pain in the old man's face and motioned him to silence. How much could the girl's brave spirit stand?

"There is something wrong, I know," repeated Joyce. "What is it? Why are you here?" she asked Steve directly, but he only glanced at Fawcett for guidance and it was Fawcett who answered her.

"He has come to arrest this man!"

"Arrest me! Who? ME?" Dureau gaped at the pointing finger foolishly. "What for? *Mon dieu!* you are crazy!"

Madame Dureau's arms went about him, clung to him with feverish anxiety, while she watched Fawcett in speechless fascination.

"For causing the death of Mrs. George Chetwood!"

The accusation came clearly, definitely, upon the breathless silence that had fallen. The room seemed filled with startled, staring faces.

"That—is—not—true!" issued from Jean Dureau's dry lips in a shocked whisper.

"Do you deny having met me before?—in the Klondyke?—during the stampede of '98? Do you deny having accepted my hospitality? As payment for that you deliberately alienated my wife's affections, talked to her with your glib tongue till you had filled her mind with silly notions, played upon her weaknesses, made love to her!"

Madam Dureau caught her breath sharply. The expression on her white face altered swiftly and through narrowed eyes she looked at her husband, who began to protest vehemently.

"He lies, Miriam! I swear to you it is all a damnable lie!"

"One forgets these little things at times," Fawcett went on with grim sarcasm. "Let me refresh his memory, Madame. About sixteen years

ago I had my home here, on this very ground where we stand now, and I left it with my wife and infant daughter to seek fortune in the Klondyke. Everybody was talking about the gold up there and the hardships were laughed at. We went." He faced Madame Dureau and spoke to her directly. "This man, your husband, stopped at my place for a while and, to make a long story short, my wife became infatuated with him and he persuaded her to run away with him. I awoke one morning to find them both gone."

He paused to control his voice. His tall, sinewy figure was stiffly erect. His face, lean and strong, was transfigured with a wistfulness which even his present awful sternness could not dominate.

"I was unable to follow them immediately. I was ill and I had my little girl to look after. They were away all winter nearly. Then, quite unexpectedly, my wife came back alone—half dead. She had taken sick and he had cast her off like a useless garment. She had walked all the way—through the snow—weak—dying on her feet!"

He paused again, struggling to master himself.

"I had provided for the baby—put her in charge in order that I might be free to leave. So when the mother came back I took her in and looked after her until I could arrange with a half-breed woman to take my place. Then I went to Dawson to find—that creature who calls himself a man!"

He advanced upon him, pointing at him, his eyes glittering. "Do you dare deny all this, Jean Dureau?"

"Answer him!" cried Madam Dureau in fierce command.

"He cannot deny it!"

"I do! I do! Miriam, I was never near the place! I don't know this man! He lies to you!" Dureau looked at her with bloodshot eyes, full of growing fear. He seized her hand and kissed it.

But she snatched it away from him, unable to speak for the rage that possessed her at thus having her husband's intrigues uncovered.

"I found you gone, Dureau, when I got to Dawson. You had just married this woman and left hurriedly. I hunted around until I found out all about you and where you were heading for. But before I could hit the trail again, word came that my wife had been found dead at the cabin—locked in her room by someone and too weak to move! My story was known in Dawson and I was accused of having locked her in and caused her death. I had to disappear quickly; for I could prove nothing at that time. But it was you who did it!"

"That's right, Fawcett. He told me he called at your place, but he said the door was locked when he got there!" Mangers was on his feet as he spoke, facing his partner, daring him.

"Take note of that, Sergeant," said Fawcett.

He reached into his pocket and extracted the note that O'Malley had given him. "This was found in my wife's room, on the floor by the bed, Dureau. It is incomplete; but it is proof enough to convict you. She wrote it with her last effort. Listen to the accusation of the dead: 'Dureau did this . . . they were afraid I would tell . . . about . . .' It ends there."

"*Mon dieu!*" The sweat of fear was on his face. "She wrote—that? Ah—but let me see it!" Fawcett held it where he could read the writing and there was born in the miserable Frenchman's eyes a gleam of cunning. "Ah, yes,—Dureau! She says 'Dureau' did it. Very well, I will confess the truth. We did call at your cabin—me and my wife here—but it was not I who locked that door! No, no!"

Fawcett was galvanized to action. He leaped for the man, gripping him by the shoulders, shaking him.

"Was the door locked before you arrived or was it before you left? Speak! Quick!"

"No, no!—not before!" gasped the man in terror. "It was not locked when we got there! But, monsieur, I did not lock the door! I did not!" he cried frantically. "Dureau—*oui!*—but my wife!"

Fawcett whirled upon her. He was losing control of himself. Emotions long dormant were welling upward, seeking vent, snapping the schooled restraint of the years like so many threads. He

had a fleeting vision of Joyce burying her white face in Martin Hardy's shoulder, of Hardy's grimness, of Steve's sudden movement into action.

"Well, Madame?"

All eyes were upon her now and the woman's true nature lay revealed in this crisis. Her eyes were positively snakish with hate, her lips moving silently as if impotent to voice the fury that flamed within her, as she regarded her husband. She appeared to have forgotten completely the presence of the others.

"*Mon dieu!* but you are a liar! Look at me! pig! It was you who locked the poor lady in! And she so weak and sick!" Her words came faster, spoken with the venom of mad jealousy. "So you are revealed, my fine husband! Another woman! Something you did not tell me, eh? Pah! And you locked her in, yet you dare to say I did it!" she shrilled. She swept the little circle with a dramatic air. "It is well, then, that I speak everything, messieurs."

"But I did it to save you!" cried Dureau wretchedly. "She knew too much and I loved you, Miriam. Ah, *cherie!* I loved you!"

"Love!" cried the woman bitterly. "*Love!* You? You call yourself a lover! And blaming me for the crime you are guilty of yourself? *Mon dieu!* You are a pig!"

"What was it that my wife knew?" came Fawcett's cold, insistent question.

"Ah, that is something *I* will tell!" laughed Dureau in wild triumph. He glared at her vindictively as she tried to stop him, her whole attitude undergoing instant change. "I locked the door because I was afraid she would tell—"

"*Jean!*"

"— what she heard when she was in my house in Dawson—when this woman,"—pointing dramatically—"rushed in and told me what she had done"

"What had she done?" prompted Steve impatiently.

"She had come to tell me that she had just killed a man. There was a handsome young man there that she was in love with, but he loved another woman and the news of their marriage made her crazy with jealousy. So, she shot him—!"

"His name? His name?" called Martin Hardy hoarsely.

"Your brother,—but yes, it was Lawrence Hardy she killed!"

He glared down at the woman, who had sunk cringing at his feet. But she had fainted.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE storm raged through the night and continued until noon the following day. Then it stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Gus Jonsen forced his way through the bank of snow outside the door and surveyed the white world around him, dazzling in the noon sunshine. The stillness was absolute.

"She's cleared up for a while," he called back into the cabin and the other men took a look outside, deciding that arrangements should be made to get away the following morning.

Steve and Fawcett had agreed that the prisoners would be quite safe in view of their utter lack of woodcraft and the climatic conditions. Accordingly, Dureau and his wife had been assigned to the big tent, which was made as comfortable as possible, while Maugers was given the use of the guide's tent. The remainder of the party shared the comfort of the cabin.

They were a happy company. The culmination of events had been swift; but with the passing of the shock, had come sudden awakening to the significance of what had transpired—realization of the changes wrought in their lives. Gone at one stroke, all the shadows of the past that for so

long had held them in chill embrace and out from the shadow's edge they had come into the bright hope of happier times. Events drew analogy from the storm in the heart of which they had been cast; doubts that bred suspicion and misunderstanding and fears swept to a cataclysm of human suffering and passions and suddenly—peace of mind, the shining sun.

Fawcett—George Chetwood—worded it:

“In all this I see consummation of one of my earliest beliefs,” he said gently. “The thing was predestined, Hardy. We have been patient and long-suffering, but now we are free. Our lives have a new horizon. I have dreamed all these years and now, as I approach the height, I look back without regrets. We have both lived, my good friend; but now life will be more worthy since we will live it, share it with others dear to us. God grant that we may safely guard their happiness through all the years to come.”

It was a wonderful smile that illumined his face as he reached for his daughter's hand and once more drew her to him. Joyce looked up at him with eyes that spoke a sweet tenderness and courage. Her whole soul seemed possessed of girlish worship for her newfound father. The power of his magnetic personality which before had influenced her, was changed to a deeper thing—a new glory, undefined. Through the fog of her passing weariness she saw Martin Hardy as the

man who had been a father to her through the long years of his mental torture and the memory of his kindnesses quickened her with infinite affection. Was ever a girl so blessed! But as she looked at her real father and sensed the suffering which tragedy had allotted as his portion, her heart yearned for him and her eyes filled. She nestled in his arms, content.

Their happiness brought a thrill of gladness to Steve. For his uncle he felt a wonderful respect; Fawcett he had always felt near to. In the happy issue of it all he rejoiced. As for himself, he had passed through much since he had first met Joyce and it had made him more of a man. He sensed the change, yet felt strangely unworthy; the memory of his many mistakes obtruded. An inconceivable loneliness made him long to go home, to carry the news to his mother and make her happy, too. It was this thought with which he retired that night.

Dawn found a huge fire crackling cheerfully, Gus preparing breakfast and all the others dressed and ready for their allotted tasks of packing and preparing to break camp.

They were still seated at breakfast when Gus, who had gone to take the prisoners their food, burst into the room excitement written large upon his weatherbeaten face.

"Them fellers an' the woman ain't there!" he shouted.

The men ran after him to the tents and soon verified the truth of this. Further investigation showed that one of the canoes was missing. At the edge of the lake all four stood, searching the waters for sign of life; but there was none. They looked at one another, each reading the same thought.

"Damn fools! Drown sure!" growled Gus.

Steve was anxious. He regretted exceedingly that he had not handcuffed them; but who would have supposed them mad enough to try going off in the night like this into a wilderness, dangerous just now even for the most experienced? He turned to Martin Hardy.

"I must ask you to get under way as quickly as possible. You understand that I must make an effort to overtake them."

"Of course, Steve. We'll go at once. Leave everything that will hinder our speed, Gus."

By noon they were on the water, bidding farewell to the little cabin that stood like a sentinel in the centre of a vast winter solitude. Time and again they stopped while Steve surveyed the shores of the lake through his glasses, but without result. Dureau could not have gone north; that would be suicide. It was reasonably certain that they had made for Beaver Landing; it was the only direction in which lay chance of escape. In

their inexperience they thought, probably, that they could get away safely.

A few words of enquiry at Mrs. Hayley's showed that the prisoners had not called there, nor had anyone seen them. Dorothy's eyes dilated with surprise when Joyce introduced Fawcett as her real father; but there was no time to go into details then and Hardy broke into the excited little group, advising Steve that he would look after the arrangements to get to the Lower Landing while Steve and Fawcett made further enquiries along the route.

The two men questioned everyone who could understand English. They searched every cabin and wigwam, even running across the narrows at the mouth of the roaring river to the Indian village. Here Fawcett's reputation stood the test and Steve realized more fully to what extent this man must have wormed his way into the good will of this simple people. But although they questioned and searched thoroughly, the visit was fruitless and they returned to the boarding-house, puzzled and discouraged.

It was Gus who suggested that the fugitives had gone down the river. The vision which he conjured up filled him with an unholy joy until Fawcett spoke to him in sharp reproof.

"If they did—God rest their souls!" he said quietly.

Steve was reluctant to consider this the solu-

tion of the disappearance, however. He had looked forward with no little satisfaction to taking them to O'Malley. But there seemed no alternative except to return without the prisoners. Winter was fast closing down and he realized that there could be no delay in reaching the waiting steamer.

He and Fawcett, therefore, decided to walk the route to the Lower Landing, the others following as soon as possible. If that failed to produce any sign of the missing trio, they would board the *Nipwam* and return to Le Pas.

An hour later, through the gathering dusk, they were creeping up the steep slope at the far end of the trail without any reward for all their searching. They went on down the avenue of axe-blazed trees towards the Lower Landing with what spirit they could muster. Then, as they came within sight of the boat they were surprised to see Captain Lester cross the gangplank and run forward to meet them.

"Glad you've come, boys. Couldn't have waited another day! Where's the rest of the bunch? Coming, eh? Good enough! I've to call at Indian Landing—at the bottom of the river—on the way down. That's why I'm in a hurry. Weather looks like hell!"

Very shortly after the arrival of the wagon, therefore, the *Nipwam* was away. The weather was bitterly cold and all but Steve were glad to seek the comfort of the tiny saloon. Steve wanted

a word with Captain Lester and climbed to the bridge.

"We're in for a heluva time!" was the greeting he received.

"Looks like it," Steve agreed.

He shivered as he visualized the trip that Dureau and his companions must have made. Not one chance in a thousand of them pulling through alive, he reflected. Even an experienced man would have hesitated to attempt it by canoe. Well he knew the terrible effect of the blinding, ice-cold spray which would envelope them in the rapids, numbing body and brain. Surely Gus was wrong in his surmise!

A group of Indians was standing on the dock at Indian Landing. Near them were three huge, canvas-wrapped bales which the *Nipwam* was to pick up. Steve, watching the impatient little skipper as he dickered with them, noted the excitement that seemed to prevail. He saw the captain bend forward and poke at the bales and the truth dawned on him suddenly. He went scrambling down the ladder from the bridge, raced along the gangplank and joined the crowd.

"My God, Steve!" cried Lester. "Do you know what's happened? These bodies were found in the river—two men and a woman—"

"We cum down pottage—see um on rocks," explained an Indian stolidly.

Steve said nothing. After all, then, he was to take them back, dead—horribly dead!

He gave the Indians money to recompense them for their labors and for the precious canvas in which they had wrapped the bodies. He selected men to carry the frozen corpses aboard noiselessly. Fortunately they succeeded in the task without attracting the attention of the passengers.

The *Nipwam* got under way again and was soon nosing bravely through the thin film of ice that was slowly but surely locking up the north in its mighty grip.

Steve turned thoughtfully towards the lighted saloon. After all, he thought, Poetic Justice had had her way. These people had come to blight the land with the taint of their methods and the North had removed them—in her own way. It was, perhaps, best.

CHAPTER XXIX

UPON arrival at Le Pas Joyce and her father established themselves at the Hotel Seymour in spite of Steve's invitation that they stay with his mother. He readily understood their desire to be by themselves, however, and did not urge it.

Hardy and Dorothy in the same hotel lingered on for a period of rest before returning home to Montreal. The experiences through which the young girl had passed had changed her subtly; she seemed more winsome, more womanly, and Hardy realized that, while they were all going to miss Joyce very greatly indeed, Dorothy was becoming more companionable. The knowledge that his name was without reproach, the touching reconciliation with Steve's mother, already were making him look years younger; much of his austerity had vanished and he laughed like a boy on occasion.

To Mrs. Hardy, too, was it a time of rejuvenation. The lifting of the curtain of doubt and suspicion that had hung over the past brought her infinite peace. She, too, looked years younger, as Inspector Michael O'Malley so frequently informed her. She had sent for Joyce and besought

forgiveness and in tears of happiness the two had found each other's hearts.

It was Steve alone who found the week a season of moods. He was restless—now wildly buoyant, now plunged in despondency. In the presence of Joyce he was quite unlike his usual bold self and felt a diffidence that made him act stiffly and unnaturally. He took to studying her face and manner when he thought she was not looking; he wondered if she dreamed how badly he needed her, what it was he was trying to summon courage to say. What right had he to ask of her so much? She would turn him down, of course! What a fool he had been!

It happened the night they went home by way of the deserted dock—a quiet night of sparkling stars. The dismantled *Nipwam* loomed beside them in her winter quarters and as a lark she had suggested that they go aboard. She had climbed forward and ensconced herself in the sheltered seat beneath the bridge. He caught his breath with the swift remembrance which the spot recalled to him and something in her manner as she looked up at him challenged him.

He sat down beside her, swallowing hard. Daringly he allowed his arm to rest on her shoulder. They were both silent for a space.

"These have been hard days for you, Joyce," he said at last. "I am glad everything has turned out all right."

"They have been—in a way," she admitted.

"And although I have tried to help, it's been like everything else I try to do—not amounting to much."

"Hasn't it?" She leaned nearer to him. "It has given us our friendship, Steve. I do not look upon that lightly."

"Friendship!" he echoed huskily. "I don't want your friendship!" He caught her roughly by the shoulders. "Joyce, that isn't enough! It is your love I have striven for! I tried to tell you so once before—in this very seat—"

"Are you so sure, then, that you have not won it?"

"Joyce!" he cried hoarsely, his heart beating wildly as she hid her face in his shoulder. His arms went about her. "Look at me!" he pleaded. "Ah, my dear girl, I love you! I love you! I love you!"

Her radiant face came from its hiding-place, tender, beautiful.

"Say it again, Steve dear!" she whispered.

THE END.

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